

LAZAROFF, KURT CHARLES, Ph.D. A Study of Teachers' Perceptions of School-Level Factors Affecting Transition Services. (2013)  
Directed by William D. Bursuck. 143 pp.

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of providing transition services to high school students with special needs and to understand the variables that act as facilitators or barriers to providing those services. A qualitative research method was used to understand the perceptions of school personnel of transition services in their school with the goal of understanding contextual variables affecting those services. The conceptual framework for this study combined two known models of school-level phenomenon: *School capacity*-a model of components of implementing school program reform, and the *Taxonomy of Transition*-a model of transition elements and activities. The sample of participants included special educators, general education teachers, and school counselors from two high schools in two different school districts: one rural and the other in a small urban area. Data were collected from each participant via one-on-one private interviews. Coding of transcribed interviews was conducted by matching participants' comments and phrases to the themes of school capacity and transition. Thematic matrices were constructed to identify associations between school capacity components and transition activities. Themes and associations were tabulated to demonstrate relative levels of association between school capacity and transition activities. Five major themes are recognized from this study. The implications of these findings for future practice and research are discussed.

A STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
SCHOOL-LEVEL FACTORS AFFECTING  
TRANSITION SERVICES

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2013

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee: Dr. William Bursuck, Dr. J. David Smith, Dr. Carl Lashley, and Dr. David F. Bateman. Thank you for your time, assistance, and guidance throughout this process. It would not have been possible to complete my program without your help. I would also like to thank my wife Dr. Sandra Tarbox, for inspiring me to begin this task and providing emotional, fiscal, and intellectual support throughout the process.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

The post-school outcomes for students with disabilities have been a concern since the 1980's. Students with disabilities have been shown to have lower graduation rates, lower rates of employment, earn lower wages, and not pursue further avenues of education beyond secondary school in comparison to non-disabled peers (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Dunn, 1996; Rojewski, 1999). These outcomes result in higher rates of poverty, increased incidence of adjudication and an overall decrease in quality of life (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Park, 2003; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005; Wehmeyer & Schlalock, 2001). Poor life outcomes continue to occur for students with disabilities, despite years of research leading to a body of evidence-based transition practices. The planning and execution of transition services in secondary schools is the responsibility of classroom special education teachers and school-based transition specialists, and their experiences implementing transition practices is an important area of study.

The process of providing special education services for students in high school is complex. Students with special needs at the secondary level require a blend of services that include academic, social, vocational and career objectives (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003). In particular, students with high- incidence disabilities, those

labeled as having learning disabilities (LD), behavioral emotional disabilities (BED) and mild intellectual disabilities have great difficulty keeping pace with the academic and social demands of secondary schools. However, secondary students with special needs have difficulties going beyond academics. Secondary level students with special needs disproportionately lack independent work habits, decision making and problem solving skills, problems that become more noticeable in comparison to same-aged peers without disabilities as they reach and advance through high school (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Rojewski, 1999). Inclusion in general education classrooms presents added challenges for these students and their teachers (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002; King & Youngs, 2003).

The needs of high school students with high-incidence disabilities go beyond school demands. Secondary level students must also focus on their post-school goals and possible career choices. Unfortunately, students with high-incidence disabilities have immature responses to demands associated with career choices (Agran & Wehmeyer, 1999; Rojewski, 1999). For example, students with high-incidence disabilities have higher dropout rates. In their analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Transition study of Special Education Students, Blackorby and Wagner (1997) dropout rates for students with learning disabilities (LD) were found to be twice that of their non-disabled peers. Further, the fact that they leave school less prepared for the responsibilities of working than their non-disabled peers leads to positions of low wages, part-time jobs and fewer opportunities for advancement (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).

Transition services, including a transition plan, are provided to address these critical post-school needs of students with disabilities. In secondary schools, transition planning is the portion of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students aged 14 years and older where post-school needs can be addressed. Created with passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act of 1990, transition plans detail movement from school to the community-at-large for students with special needs. The transition plan is a separate component within the IEP; it has its own specially designed goal pages and service provision sheet, and follows its own process within the IEP team meeting. The strengths and needs of the student regarding transition goals are set apart, requiring an individual review of the student's transition oriented goals, objectives and methods of attaining both.

The transition plan also mandates the inclusion of the student in the process; thus, the student is a major team member in the development and implementation of the transition plan (NCDPI, 2008; Thoma, Rogan, & Baker, 2001). Student involvement and student facilitation of the IEP transition plan meeting have been shown to be important factors in student achievement of transition goals (Deschler et al., 2001; Powers et al., 2001; Woods, Sylvester, & Martin, 2010). Family and community are other partners in the transition plan (Timmons, Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, Allen, & McIntyre, 2004). Non-school agencies and institutions become involved in the implementation of the transition plan. Outside service providers for health care, occupational rehabilitation and vocational training, employers and post-secondary schools are all potentially included within a transition plan.

Perhaps the most important persons in the transition process are special education teachers, for it is their responsibility to coordinate the transition plan, guiding the student and the outside agencies as they work in concert toward attaining the transition goals as planned. The special education teacher's position as the leader is a difficult one. Special education teachers face many challenges as they work to implement student transition plans using available resources.

With the advent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind or NCLB), focus has been placed on all students with high-incidence disabilities meeting the same academic standards as their non-disabled general education peers. This emphasis on access to the general education curriculum has caused priorities such as transition planning to be pushed aside, focusing resources on an important but relatively small portion of a high school student's IEP. For example, the emphasis on access to the general education curriculum has led to the ever-increasing inclusion of students with special needs in general education classes and reduction of teacher focus on transition activities (Wandry et al., 2008). While placement in general education classes can provide important learning and social opportunities for students with disabilities, inclusive practices can place additional pressure on special educators. This focus on standards can also lead to less emphasis on more functional student outcomes related to later-life adjustment (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002).

General education classes for students with high-incidence disabilities often include co-teaching support so that the students can receive adapted instruction within the general education classroom. This demand to co-teach might further increase the

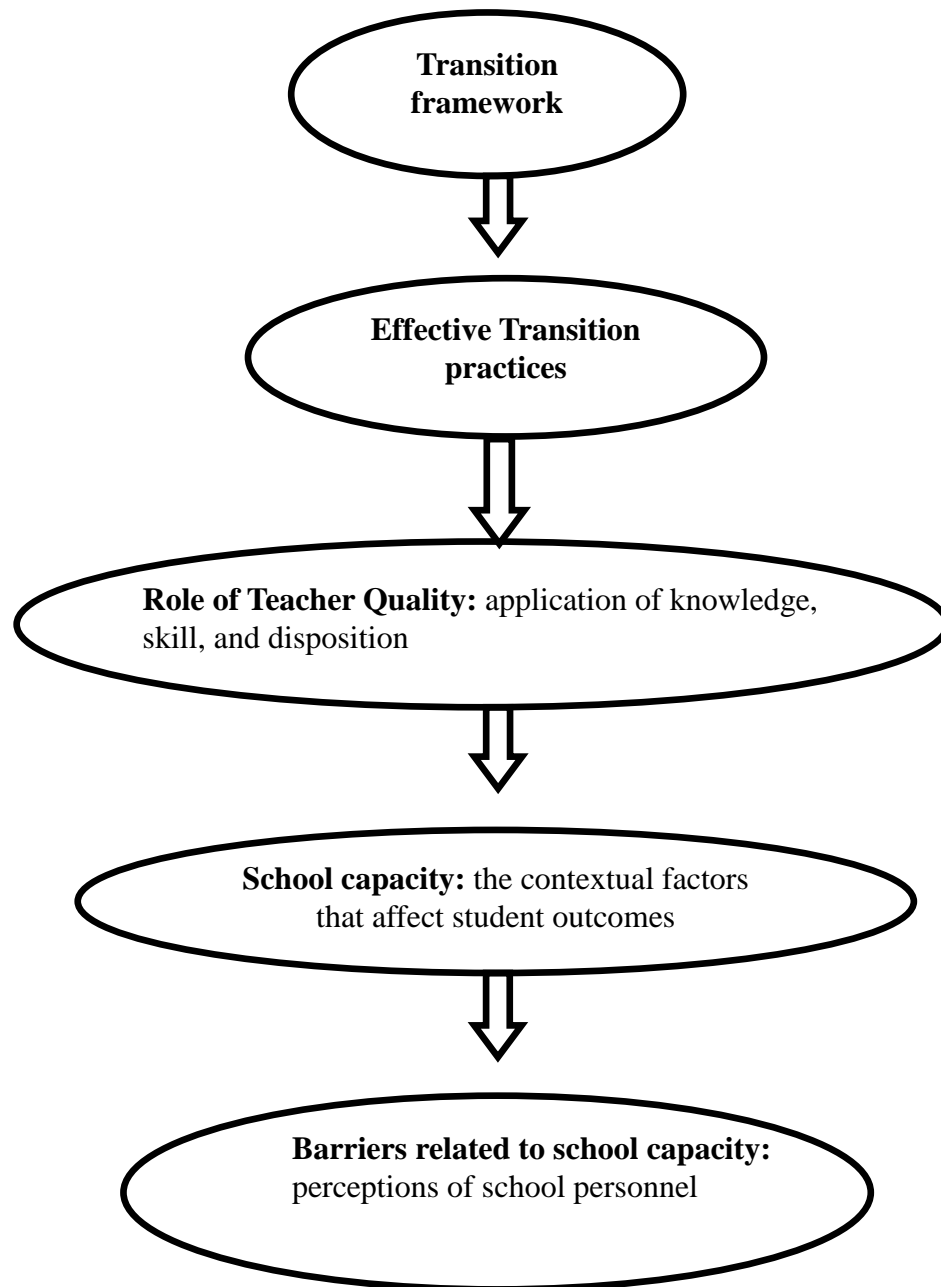
workload of the special education teacher, leaving less time for supporting the attainment of the other IEP mandated goals found within the transition plan (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002; Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on an analysis of the evolution of the research and subsequent practice of providing transition services and is modeled in a five-level progression. Madeline Will's initial effort to impose structure on the transition process has led researchers to create a substantial body of knowledge that has progressed in both depth and focus. Beginning with defining transition services, the research has evolved towards an analysis of implementation and the factors affecting the quality of services provided. Still, even with nearly 30 years of research, there are threads that have yet to be explored. The conceptual framework is shown in Fig. 1. A narrative description of each level of the framework also follows. At the initial level of this conceptual framework, is Will's (1983) initial conception of the transition process, the second and subsequent level is comprised of the standards of effective transition practices as established by Kohler (1996). These standards of effective transition practice have been adopted with the intent they be implemented in classrooms. The third level involves issues related to teacher quality and focuses on teachers' perception of their ability to provide transition services and the quality of their preparation. In this body of research, great concern has been voiced about the professional development and training provided to teachers. As this area of research has progressed, researchers have noted that the quality of services and the ability of teachers to provide services are also affected

negatively by contextual and environmental factors and that these areas need further investigation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The fourth level of the framework identifies School Capacity a model of school reform program implementation. This level of the framework is a reference point to begin identifying contextual variables affecting teacher transition activities that might include school policies and practices, and administrative leadership at the school and district level (Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004). Level five, the final level of the conceptual framework is focused on refining the understanding of contextual barriers to transition services and represents this study's potential to explore and understand teacher perceptions of these factors.

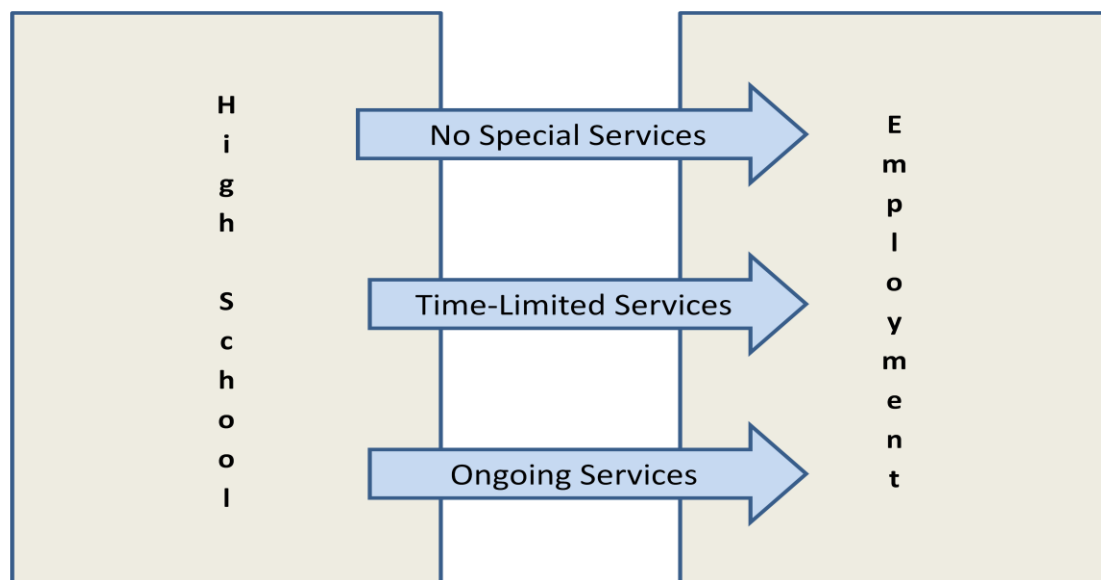
### **Transition Framework**

The impetus for the substantial growth of the knowledge and practice of post-secondary transition services is often credited to a policy statement made by Madeleine Will in 1984. At that time, Will was the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and issued a statement paper regarding an initiative focusing on transition for youth with disabilities. This essay, OSERS Programming for the transition of Youth with Disabilities: *Bridges from School to Working Life* (1984) provided the conceptual foundation for the practice of transition that is referred to in Figure 1.

The foundation for transition services Will suggested included a three-tiered system of service delivery, each tier representing a class of support based on student needs. The highest level represents a small amount of support wherein no or minimal assistance is given to students as they progress from high school to the workforce and essentially receive the same level of help as their non-disabled peers. The next level was

time-limited services that lead to employment at the end of service delivery. The final level was ongoing services such as supported employment and sheltered workshops where support continued during employment.

Figure 2. Major Components of the Transition Process (Will, 1984, p. 3).



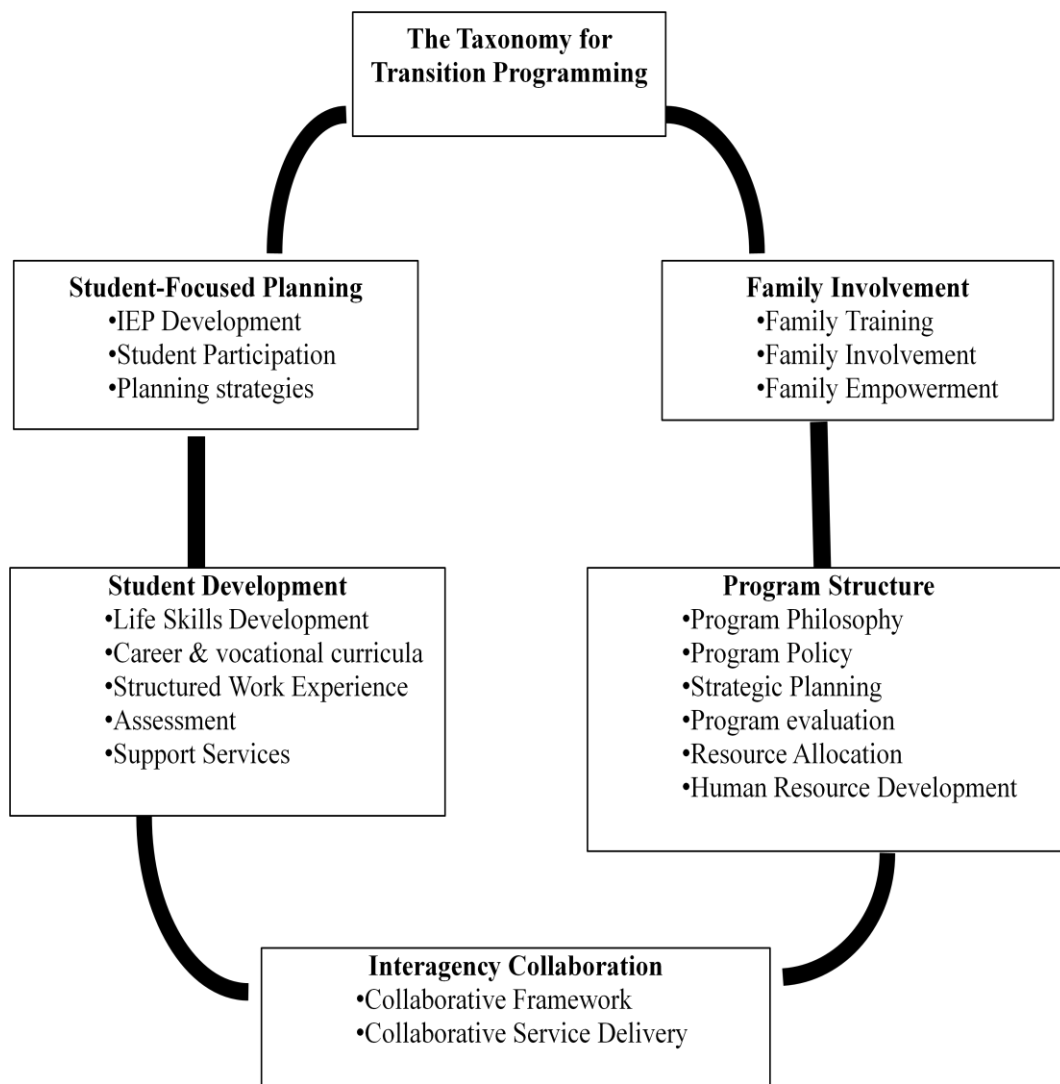
### Effective Transition Practice

Based on a review of pertinent literature, evaluation studies and outcomes from model programs, Kohler categorized the components of effective transition practices and conceptualized a Taxonomy of Transition Programming with the purpose of linking theory with practice (Kohler, 1996). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming by Kohler (1996) describes the structure of transition services, categorizing the major components and listing the sub-elements. These are shown in Figure 3. The Taxonomy for Transition Programming separates transition programming into five major areas: *student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, interagency*



*collaboration and program structure.* Each of these five areas is important in achieving positive transition outcomes (Kohler, 1996). Transition services have been further defined by the inclusion of professional standards as set by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) following Kohler's model.

Figure 3. The Taxonomy of Transition Programming Kohler (1996) p. 6



The CEC Division on Career Development and Transition has a detailed professional standard for special education teachers and transition coordinators establishing the skill sets and professional knowledge required to perform duties related to each role in providing transition services (CEC-DCDT, 2000a; CEC-DCDT, 2000b). Recent reviews of the transition practice literature have continued to identify effective practices that are evidence-based and improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Test et al., 2009; Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). The quality with which these practices are delivered, including variables related to teacher preparation and school context is explained in the next two levels of the conceptual framework.

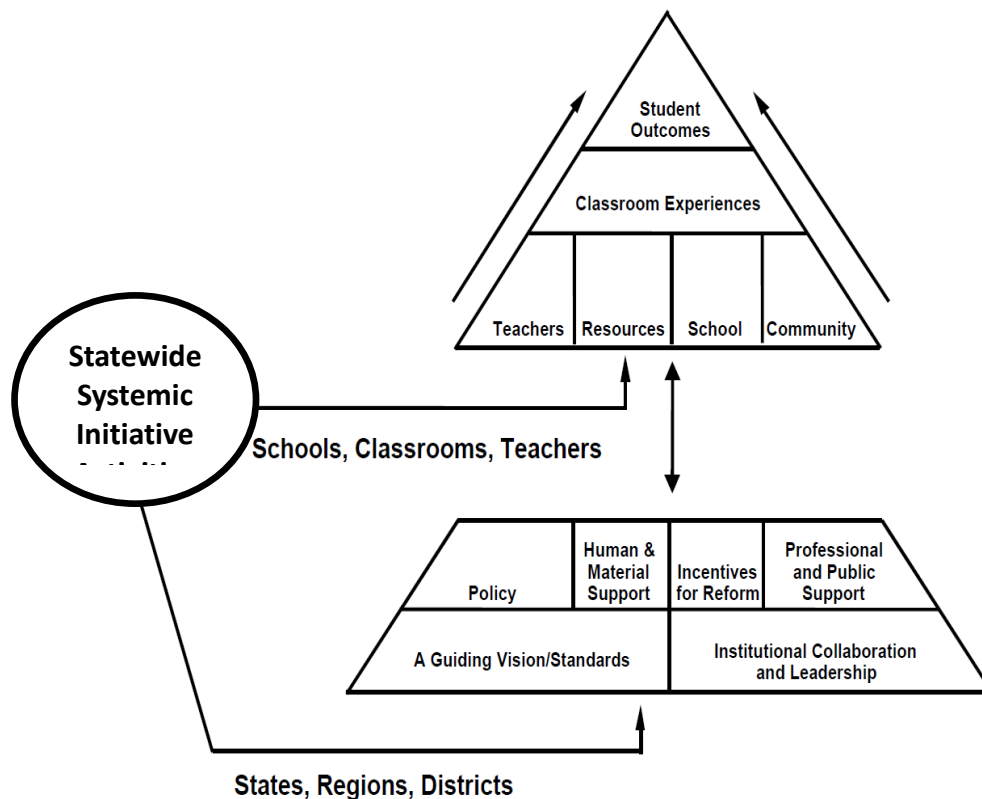
### **Role of Teacher Quality**

The standards of transition practice have been the core components analyzed in research of the state of transition practice in the field. Studies of teacher quality have used survey data of classroom teachers and other school personnel who interact with students with disabilities to ascertain teacher perceptions of providing transition services. Successively, each study has presented more detail toward the understanding of the teacher perspectives of providing transition services (Benitez, Morningstar & Frey, 2009; Knot & Asselin, 1999; Wasburn-Moses, 2006). Overall, these studies show teacher preparation is the primary concern of teachers; however, the importance of contextual factors was introduced as a secondary concern needing study in future research.

## School Capacity

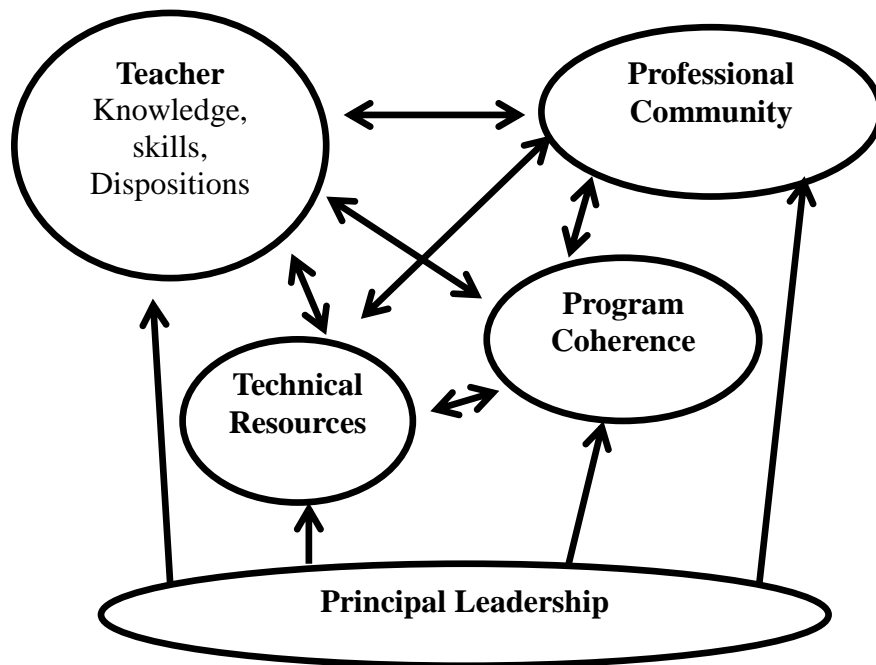
School capacity has been identified as one of the factors that affect student outcomes in the school environment. Early research into the implementation of statewide systemic programs into the public schools in seven states by the National Science Foundation (NSF) produced a model of systemic reform that includes variables that affect student achievement (LaGuarda, 1998). In the NSF model of school reform, factors at multiple levels from state, district, school, and classroom are presented. This model is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. NSF Model of Systemic School Reform at the State Level. (Zucker, A., Blank, R., & Gross, S. (1995). *Evaluation of the National Science Foundation's Statewide Systemic Initiatives (SSI) Program: Second Year Report: Cross-cutting Themes*. National Science Foundation. p. 4



School reform research has revealed that creation of meaningful change within a school cannot be relegated to the change that occurs in the practice of a single teacher but relies on school capacity to create a systemic support of change (Fullan, 2001; Newman, King, & Youngs, 2001). Further refining the concepts introduced in the NSF model of systemic reform, Newman, King, and Youngs (2001) define school capacity as the structural conditions, such as program coherence and alignment, coordinated curriculum, sufficient resources, and adequate time for staff to plan collaboratively and/or implement change, that will contribute to the likelihood that school reform will be undertaken with commitment.

Figure 5. Model of School Capacity. (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2001), p. 262



School capacity is important for a school as it establishes structures and policies that aid in successful improvement initiatives and directly affects instruction. (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2000; Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) emphasizes the importance of school capacity as the factor in creating building- level change. In his view, teacher preparation and professional development alone cannot create meaningful change. An infrastructure that support teachers is also needed.

### **Barriers Related to School Capacity**

School capacity in the model of Newman, King, and Youngs, (2001) includes the component referred to as technical resources. Technical resources can be most closely aligned with the contextual factors being explored in transition services. Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) studied perceptions of transition barriers, practices, and potential solutions in schools in Florida. In the responses from high school special education teachers, the top three barriers were resources, stakeholder involvement, and systems and policies. Of these themes identified in their research, the theme described as “systems and policies” included: (a) systems support of transition services, (b) a philosophy that transition is a priority or has administrative support, and (c) transition service procedures and policies developed that were related to graduation requirements or high stakes testing.. There is some overlap of these barriers within the research. Lubbers, et al. (2008) note participants’ comments of systems and policy issues related to teacher caseloads, staffing, and policies that include funding for personnel. With a broad effect on the institution, this particular theme may be the key to connecting the activities

of transition planning that reach out beyond the classroom and provide the material and institutional support for teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students' post-school outcomes are not improving, despite making transition services an integral component of students' IEPs at the secondary level. Research has been conducted establishing teacher preparation as a major factor in improving student outcomes. However, having effective preparation programs is necessary but not sufficient. There are other barriers to implementing effective practices other than preparation. Studies of teacher perceptions of providing transition services have only just begun to extend our understanding beyond teacher preparation and knowledge. Teachers must be trained what to teach, and how to teach; however, the question of what barriers keep a teacher from utilizing their professional training in transition is, as of yet, unanswered.

A comprehensive analysis of the barriers to transition services within secondary schools is needed. Such an analysis should go beyond the matter of whether or not standards are being followed to include researching contextual factors underlying effective practice. It is the goal of this research to discover, examine, and begin to form a framework for understanding the contextual variables affecting teachers' delivery of transition services.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of school capacity related barriers and how they are linked to providing transition services. This

research utilizes a qualitative research methodology based on grounded theory. No framework is theorized a priori for this research, but the narrative of teachers was collected, analyzed, and categorized in hopes of seeing patterns, similarities, or contrasts that give deeper understanding to the systems and policy barriers to providing transition services. Grounded theory offers the opportunity to examine the context of the data collected and in doing so, context becomes a major variable in the process of explaining collected data and understanding phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research aim is to explore special education teachers' understanding of systems and policy factors as barriers to providing effective transition services.

### **Research Questions**

This purpose of this research is to explore these questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the nature and extent of the *facilitating factors* and *barriers* to providing transition services that are related to school capacity?
2. How do these school capacity related facilitators and barriers affect different aspects of the process of providing transition services?
3. What are teacher and administrator recommendations for improving how transition services are provided in their school and how do these relate to school capacity?

### **List of Key Terms**

**Transition Services.** The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be an outcomes-based process, focused on facilitating the child's movement from school to post-school activities,

including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (Will, 1984; [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)].

**The Taxonomy of Transition Programming.** A conceptual framework of transition services that includes the major components of student focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement and program structures (Kohler, 1996).

**School Capacity.** A conceptual model of school program implementation that assesses structural conditions, such as program coherence and alignment, coordinated curriculum, sufficient resources, and adequate time for staff to plan collaboratively and/or implement change, which will contribute to the likelihood that a school program will be undertaken with commitment (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2001).

**Teacher Quality.** Teachers' perception of their ability to provide transition services and the quality of their preparation as related to the professional standards as set by the CEC Division on Career Development and Transition. (CEC-DCDT, 2000a; CEC-DCDT, 2000b).

**Effective Practices.** Effective practice are structured teaching activities that are designed to produce an intended educational outcome and have been substantiated via multiple evidence-based research studies to produce positive results with moderate to high statistical effects (Gersten et al., 2005).



**Contextual Factors.** Contextual factors may include, but are not exclusively limited to school culture, instructional organization, stakeholder engagement, and instruction/assessment resources (National High School Center, National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010).

**Systems and policy.** An institution's rules and rule making process which may have either positive or negative effects on the resources, support, and coordination of factors which impact a teacher's ability to provide transition services (Weiss, 1999).

### **Limitations**

This research was undertaken with known limitations of sampling, potential researcher bias, and participant sensitivity. Each of these factors could limit the validity, and generalizability of the findings.

Sampling represents several challenges to this study. Proper interview protocol was kept and sample size limited to meet practical considerations of time and travel expense. The maximum limit of participants was to be no more than fifteen. Attaining institutional permission for teacher and educator participation in the study was a challenge and limited the types of schools (rural, suburban, or urban) and school size included, both potentially important variables to consider in terms of the contextual factors the study is exploring.

Participant sensitivity to the topic was foreseen as a limitation. The involvement of special education teachers, general education teachers, and school counselors in a discussion of how their school or school district's systems and policies act as barriers or

potential barriers to providing transition services could be construed as a violation of professional ethics or work place confidentiality.

Finally, researcher bias could also be a limiting factor. The researcher in this study is a former high school special educator and has personal experiences that could affect data interpretation and limit the study's validity.

### **Summary**

Transition services are an important final preparation for students before they move to the next stage of their lives. The services are complicated as they approach many aspects of student preparation that include tangible skills such as job training or study strategies, and the less material personal attributes of self-determination. Transition services transcend the school walls as outside agencies, employers, and post-secondary schools can be brought into action as part of a student's transition plan. Despite a research base for establishing individual transition practices, actual post-school outcomes for students with disabilities still lag behind their non-disabled peers. Researchers have examined the issue of teacher quality as a possible explanation for this continued gap in post-school outcomes. An examination of teacher perceptions of transition practices at the school level has revealed that while teacher preparation is an important factor in providing transition services there are contextual factors that affect teacher ability to make available such services.

The further examination of contextual factors affecting teachers' ability to provide transition services would be valuable to the knowledge base of transition practices. Indeed, Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) have done initial research into teachers'

perceptions of contextual barriers and identified nine themes within participant responses. Of interest to this researcher and the focus of this study are the themes and how they fit within the model of school capacity regarding transition services.

This study employed qualitative methodology and utilize a grounded theory approach. Qualitative research is an appropriate method to examine context as individuals are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The theme of systems and policy is emergent in the study of transition services and the fluidity by which the researcher may pursue a question with another can increase the depth of explanation from the participants (Merriam, 2001). The interview questions were open-ended and pursue the participants' understanding of how the systems and policies of the work environment affect their ability to provide transition services. Using a grounded theory approach, the data were analyzed for comparison to previous research and responses from participants of this study was examined closely to further gain an understanding of teacher perceptions of systems and policy on transition services (Creswell, 1994). The information gathered in this study should facilitate a more explicit description of this theme and give direction to future research exploring contextual variables affecting teacher ability to provide transition services.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

#### **Introduction**

The initial chapter of this study describes a rationale and outline for research of barriers to providing transition services. Following that outline, this literature review's aim is to demonstrate the connections between Madeleine Will's 1984 policy paper formatting the future research and development of transition services, to the research basis for transition standards of practice, research into the role of teacher quality in providing transition services, the concept of school capacity as a basis for understanding contextual factors within schools, and the extent of the research into contextual barriers at the school level. Through studying the creation and core of transition practice, utilizing research of school reform and examining its implementation as an external program not unlike other school reform, the contextual barriers can be further understood.

#### **Framework of Transition**

In 1984, the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation (OSERS), Madeleine Will, presented a model of transition services in a published guide entitled: *OSERS Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life*. In the document Will described and defined transition as “an outcome oriented process that encompasses a student's life and

includes a broad array of services and experiences that leads to employment” (Will, 1984, p. 1).

“*Bridges from School to Working Life*” describes the process of transition in terms of three assumptions. The first assumption is post-school outcomes are complex and variable. While students can expect consistency in the delivery of services within a public school setting, the same is not true of adult services. The complexity makes it difficult for the professionals to comprehend availability of supports, to collaborate with parents and work with students with disabilities who cannot independently negotiate the system (Will 1984).

The second assumption is transition applies to all students with disabilities. Will noted there are a large number of students with disabilities who leave special education and receive services in general education but who would still benefit from support in finding adult employment and in making post-secondary educational choices (Will, 1984).

The third assumption is the goal of all students is employment. Sustained employment is the most important outcome of education for every American. Special education should focus on post-school employment for all students whether immediately after secondary school or after post-secondary education (Will, 1984). Will noted the measure of outcome quality in terms of employment is the same for persons with disabilities and those without. The key components of employment are income level and the opportunities created from the income, and the purchasing power that allows a person’s capacity to integrate with the community at multiple levels (Will, 1984).

The OSERS model of transition was designed to represent the levels of support that persons with disabilities would individually require. The model recognized the intensity of accommodations and breadth of support that individuals require instead of a single transition model with a focus on the process and procedures of transition rather than upon a student's personal needs.

It is from this point that transition became a major focus within the legislative mandates of special education. Reference to transition had been included in both vocational and special education legislation but a consistent model of the process and format of transition was yet to be promulgated. The funding that was sought in the early 1980's via the Education of the Handicapped Amendments of 1984 (P. L. 98-199), was to create a body of knowledge of transition as a process, to develop models of transition service and to promote the implementation of such transition services. This was the initial federal commitment to inclusion of transition services into the school-based practice of special education and is considered a pivotal event.

Key components with *Bridges from School to Working Life* gave a depth of support for activities related to transition. Included in the model were initiatives that would explore research development, demonstration research, and replication of all areas of high school transition services. High school programming should include community based employment as well as vocational educational opportunities. Emphasis was to be placed upon "regular and frequent contact" with the students' non-disabled peers, anticipating student needs after high school, and making efforts to prepare students for possible educational opportunities in vocational or post-secondary institutions, especially

students with mild disabilities or learning disabilities (Will, 1984). In each of these areas of concern, *Bridges from School to Working Life* describes a continuity of service which is dependent on working directly with agencies and institutions beyond the high school and public school system. A final prescription for the future of transition services was the necessity to examine the transition experience. The effect of transition services upon students was relatively unknown. The importance of creating strategies for program evaluation was noted and it was felt that it should take into account the *entire transition model*.

*Bridges from School to Working Life* was the model for what has been implemented as transition services. The methods of studying the design and demonstration of effective practices and the inclusion of transition as an integral component within a student's individualized education program (IEP) have all been accomplished. In further study of transition practices and the role of teachers in delivering those services, the complexity of variables affecting transition services can be better understood.

### **Effective Transition Practices**

The study of transition has led to key conceptual definitions of its structure and the characteristics of its best practice. Two models which have given structure to the understanding of transition services were developed by Halpern (1994) and Kohler (1996). Research into effective practice of transition services has typically followed the structure of these conceptual models.

Halpern (1994) describes a model of transition program standards based on domains related to students' post-school transition needs *and* the components required to implement a program. According to Halpern, the six domains are: 1) curriculum and instruction, 2) coordination and mainstreaming, 3) transition, 4) Documentation, 5) Administrative support, and 6) Adult services and community resources. Each domain is related to activities which are prescribed as a program standard. Table 1 includes . examples of program standards Halpern used to describe the transition model.

Table 1. Transition Team Model Program Standards (Halpern,1994).

Areas of Need	Program Standard
Curriculum and instruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students with disabilities receive appropriate instruction in social/interpersonal skills, which prepare them to interact effectively with people in their communities.</li> <li>2. Procedures exist for placing students into instructional program that is tailored to their individual needs.</li> </ol>
Coordination and mainstreaming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students with disabilities have opportunities to learn prerequisite skills that are needed to participate in regular academic programs.</li> <li>2. A process exists for enhancing program planning and administrative collaboration between special education and the regular vocational program</li> </ol>
Transition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information exists on community services currently available for school leavers with disabilities.</li> <li>2. A process exists for enhancing collaboration between special educational and relevant adult agencies</li> </ol>
Documentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Procedures exist for evaluating the immediate impact of instruction in terms of student learning outcomes.</li> <li>2. Procedures exist for conducting systematic follow-along evaluations on the community adjustment of school leavers with disabilities.</li> </ol>
Administrative support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Administrative procedures exist for using aides, volunteers, and job coaches effectively within secondary special education programs, both in the schools and in the community.</li> <li>2. Appropriate in-service training is regularly provided to personnel who are responsible for secondary special education and transition programs.</li> </ol>
Adult services and community resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sufficient service programs and community resources are available to meet the residential needs of young adults with disabilities.</li> <li>2. Sufficient service programs and community resources are available to meet the employment needs of young adults with disabilities.</li> </ol>



While it does describe conditions that should be present to implement a transition program in a high school, Halpern's model does not prescribe standards of teacher knowledge or skills. Halpern's model is adequate in giving structure to the scope of systemic investment that might be necessary to implement a successful transition program, but it lacks details to execute classroom or student level teacher activities.

A detailed description of essential components for effective transition is found in the Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996). To further connect theory with practice, the Taxonomy of Transition Programming was intended to be a model which made sense to all stakeholders in the transition process, from policy makers to families (Kohler, 1996). The core components of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming were derived from three research reviews. .

The first study performed was a literature review that searched documents related to transition for practices that supported transition. From these 49 articles three transition practices were identified by half of the articles examined: *vocational training*, *parent involvement*, and *interagency collaboration and service delivery*. One third of the articles examined noted the practices of *social skills training*, and *individual transition planning* (Kohler, 1993; Kohler, 1996).

The second study which informed the structure of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming was a review of 15 evaluation studies from exemplary transition programs. The best programs had all employed the practices of *vocational assessment*, *social skills training*, *parent involvement*, *community-based and community-referenced instruction*,

*transition-focused IEPs, least restrictive settings, and inter-disciplinary IEP teams*

(Kohler, DeStafano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994; Kohler, 1996).

A final review of 42 employment-focused transition programs examined common project activities, purposes, outcomes and barriers. Kohler's (1996) conclusions drawn from this study were that these projects provided:

Work skills training, developed programs or materials, and evaluated their effectiveness, disseminated information, and conducted public relations activities and training. In line with these activities, projects reported that they achieved specific outcomes: employment of individuals, establishment of training programs and services, and development of cooperative delivery systems (Rusch, Kohler, & Hughes, 1992). (p. 15)

From these three reviews, Kohler isolated practices that focused on students' transitions from school to adult life and the documented outcomes. The final investigation was conducted in two parts. Initially, a survey of 296 transition professionals from across the United States was conducted. The survey instrument was a list of the best transition practices identified in the previous three reviews and organized them by activity type. Participants were asked to mark the practices they felt should be included in a comprehensive list of best practices. Part two of the investigation was sent to the 207 participants who had completed Part 1 of the survey. These participants were asked to sort practices by "practice category." And then rate them from *least important to most important*.

From the results of the 3 literature reviews and the surveys, a conceptual model of transition was created: the Taxonomy of Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996). The five core components of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming were as follows:

student-focused planning, student development, interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement, and program structure and attributes (Kohler, 1996).

The Taxonomy breaks transition programming into five major areas: student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, interagency collaboration and program structure. Each of these five areas is important in achieving positive transition outcomes (Kohler, 1996). Student focused planning includes IEP development, planning strategies, and the fostering of student participation. Student development is composed of six separate areas: life skills instruction, employment skills instruction, career and vocational curricula, support services, assessment, and structured work experience. Interagency collaboration has two major components, collaborative service delivery and collaborative framework. Family involvement has three major components, family involvement, family empowerment, and family training. Program structure has six components: program philosophy, program evaluation, strategic planning, program policy, human resource development and resource allocation. The taxonomy offers a comprehensive practical analysis of the components of transition that positively affect outcomes for students with disabilities.

In a continuation into the examination of effective transition practices, three subsequent comprehensive reviews of literature have been undertaken and increased the original number of studies supporting effective transition practices from the 11 identified by Kohler in 1993 to 120 that met either federal guidelines for educational research, showed moderate effect sizes, or met a quality checklist for experimental research design (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Test et al., 2009). In each of these

literature reviews Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996) was the primary model for categorizing transition practices.

Test et al. (2009) performed a more recent extensive literature review to identify evidence -based practices in secondary transition. His review employed three levels of analysis to select appropriate research articles for inclusion; the criteria for inclusion were based on the quality indicator checklists for experimental research from Gersten et al. (2005). Both literature reviews and single and group experimental articles were included in their meta-analysis. Findings were organized according to the categories found within the Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996).

In the end, 63 studies were chosen which met the established criteria of being of high enough quality to represent evidence for effective secondary transition practices. The results showed evidence- based practices are not evenly distributed across categories of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming. For example, student -focused planning included three evidence-based practices supported by a single literature review and six experimental design studies. Within the area of student development, 25 practices were included that were confirmed by 62 studies of these transition practices. Evidence-based practices in the area of program structures were substantiated by 10 studies. Family involvement was found to be supported by one group experimental study. Test et al. (2009) found no studies with a level of effectiveness that supported components of inter-agency collaboration.

Cobb and Alwell (2009) reviewed the literature focused on transition planning and coordinating interventions. Analyzing studies that qualified as scientifically-based

research studies, Cobb and Alwell (2009) selected and reviewed 31 studies for evidence of measured effectiveness. Using the federal guidelines for research standards as criteria for inclusion in the study Cobb and Alwell (2009), searched for intervention studies completed between 1984 and 2004. Studies were chosen that were performed in the secondary school environment, included data on students with disabilities, and outcomes that were academic, transition, or drop out focused.

Using Kohler's Taxonomy of Transition as the organizing format, the authors aligned the selected research studies with each of the five major constructs. As in the review of literature by Test et al. (2009), the number of studies supporting practices in each construct was not evenly distributed. Student development had the greatest number of studies demonstrating effectiveness with 16. Student planning practices were supported by 13 studies. The category of collaboration included seven studies. Effective practices for family involvement included five studies, and program structure had four studies demonstrating effective practices (Cobb & Alwell, 2009).

A matrix showing the number of studies selected from the Test et al (2009) and Cobb and Alwell (2009) reviews across the five component areas of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming shows the imbalance of research in effective practices (see Table 2). One strength of examining a composite perspective of results of the two literature reviews is it reveals a lack of duplication in selected studies; only one study (Van Reusen & Bos, 1994) is shared by them.

Table 2

Comparison of the number of studies included in each category of the Taxonomy of Transition Programming by Test et al. (2009) and Cobb and Alwell (2009).

Construct Study	<i>Student Focused Planning</i>	<i>Student Development</i>	<i>Collaborative Service Delivery</i>	<i>Family Involvement</i>	<i>Program Structure</i>
<b>Test et al. (2009)</b>	7	25	0	1	10
<b>Cobb and Alwell (2009)</b>	13	16	7	5	4
total # of studies	19*	41	7	6	14

Note. \*the total recognizes that both literature reviews included Van Reusen and Bos (1994) in their results.

Landmark, Ju, and Zhang, (2010) performed a literature review to update the list of substantiated best transition practices. Unlike the literature reviews performed by Test et al. (2009) and Cobb and Alwell, (2009), Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) did not use the organizational format of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming to structure their findings. Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) utilized criteria developed by Kohler (1993) to select research focused on secondary level students' post-secondary outcomes with a dependent variable that could be affected by educators in the transition period. Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) identified 29 documents that fit the selection criteria. These studies were organized into categories of substantiated practice and included on the basis of the number of studies which supported the practice. New categories of practice were added if they were supported by studies meeting the criteria established in the author's stated methodology. Overall, eight substantiated practices were presented in the results of the literature review, and, like the results noted in the studies of Test et al. (2009) and Cobb

and Alwell (2009), the number of studies supporting each practice were not evenly distributed.

For Landmark et al. (2010), the most frequently validated transition practice was *paid and un-paid work experience*. This practice was followed in level of substantiation by employment preparation, family involvement, general education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills, self-determination training and community or agency collaboration (Landmark, et al., 2010). As with the other reviews, the results of Landmark et al. review shows the imbalance in the amount of research validating the various transition practices.

While research into effective transition practices is continuing, the combined findings of the three major literature reviews included here have added considerable depth and clarity to the effective transition practices literature and is enough to , create a distinctive definition of what transition services are and provide direction for the activity of teachers. The ever-broadening core of effective transition practices gives high school level educators and administrators a selection of appropriate interventions to fit the needs of students. That said, the greatest challenge they may face is choosing from among them given diverse student needs and the requirement of personalized and focused transition requirements. Kohler and Field (2003) caution that despite the large selection of effective transition practices, schools still run the risk of seeking a "one-size-fits-all" or "check box" solution to the problems of providing the individualized transition plans that students require.

The definition of effective transition practice is important to this research. Identifying school- level effective practices helps answer the questions: "What should teachers be doing?" and "What do effective transition practices look like?" Teacher descriptions of transition activities should have a direct connection to these effective practices and be recognizable as such in the participant narrative. Allowing teachers to articulate their experiences can illuminate the essentials of how choices of effective practice were made, taking into consideration the demands of a student's disability, family background, and academic and vocational capabilities..

### **Role of Teacher Quality**

High school special educators have a complex role to fulfill. Special education teachers have primary responsibility of developing the student IEP and they serve as classroom teachers. As such, they are both the coordinator/facilitator of student transition services *and* a direct provider of services. Research examining the school-level roles and attitudes of special education professionals have focused on educators' perceptions and the quality of pre-service and professional development training in transition services. For the purposes of this study, teacher quality will focus on the teacher perceptions of their ability to provide transition services and their assumptions of the effectiveness of those services.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Their Knowledge, Skills, and Disposition**

A literature search was conducted to investigate research related to the quality of teacher transition practices. The search was conducted by reviewing academic databases using the terms "transition," "transition evaluation," "transition program evaluation" and



“transition services evaluation.” Six articles were found related to teacher perceptions of providing transition services to secondary students with special needs.

Knott and Asselin (1999) surveyed 214 secondary level special education teachers. The survey was comprised of questions concerning their level of knowledge,, involvement in, and perceptions of the importance of transition planning and the delivery of transition services. Knott and Asselin’s findings showed teachers felt they had the necessary knowledge of the foundations of transition. Teachers indicated that they were well versed in the problems, issues, concepts and definitions related to transition. However, in their discussion and summary, Knott and Asselin (1999) noted several gaps between knowledge, involvement and service delivery for teachers of students with mild disabilities. The teachers working with students with mild disabilities desired more information on the topics of inter-agency collaboration, support agencies, and employment related activities. Knott and Asselin recommended that state teacher preparation and in-service programs focus “less on philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of transition and more on communication and interagency collaboration.” (p. 6). This final point must be considered carefully due to the inclusion of students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms; special education teachers must be prepared to plan and deliver transition services within that context.

In a survey of 191 secondary level special education teachers in the state of Michigan, Wasburn-Moses (2005) investigated the educators’ daily work, school roles and responsibilities, students taught, and the effectiveness of teacher preparation. The survey employed teacher ratings and open-ended comments to examine the perceived

effectiveness of transition programs. Wasburn-Moses found the teachers rated their effectiveness in transition planning the lowest. Only 37.3% of the teachers rated their effectiveness in this category as satisfactory. Of the teachers who made comments regarding transition planning, the most common response was that transition planning was a skill they needed to improve. Teachers were also concerned about collaborative efforts involving other special education teachers and district officials. Teacher related concerns about dealing with outside agencies, and the lack of a coordinated transition process within their schools. In her final discussion, Wasburn-Moses noted consistent concerns among teacher about the lack of a coherent transition program including a lack of options for students. In particular, teachers rated transition planning the lowest in terms of areas needing better coordination, training, planning time, and their involvement. Wasburn-Moses emphasized that the inclusion of a majority of students with special needs in general education classrooms and the resulting focus on standards was not allowing for the individualized transition planning, instruction and services. required to increase positive student outcomes.

In a study of teacher candidates' perceptions of barriers to effective transition programming, Wandry et al. (2008) surveyed 196 teacher candidates from five special education teacher preparation programs. The study was conducted over a period of one year on a single cohort of teacher candidates in each of the teacher preparation programs. The survey was designed to be given as a pretest before the teacher candidates had taken a course on transition services and again as a posttest after completion of a course on transition services. The first section contained demographic information, the second

questions about preparation for transition services; the third asked participants to suggest facilitators and barriers to effective practices in transition, and the fourth section asked participants about perspectives experiences with the transition process.

Wandry et al. (2008) reported that student opinions changed from pre-test when teacher candidates felt parent involvement and student involvement were the most important facilitators of transition practices. After training, teacher knowledge of transition followed by educator interest in transition was most important. Student perceptions of the barriers to transition practices also changed from pre to posttest. In the pretest survey, 61.1% identified inadequate parental involvement as the greatest barrier to transition practices followed by *lack of teacher knowledge of transition*, and then *inadequate fiscal support*. Posttest results showed that their opinions had changed with 64.4% of the participants identifying *inadequate staff to provide transition services* as the number one barrier and inadequate fiscal support as the second, followed by lack of teacher knowledge and, lastly inadequate parental involvement.

Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) studied perceptions of transition barriers, practices and solutions of special education teachers in Florida. They designed the Transitions Programs and Services (T-PAS) survey to identify the barriers to transition practices, practices that facilitate the transition process, and recommendations for improvements to the transition process. The survey contained three parts: demographics, information on transition programming and services, and barriers, effective practices, and solutions. Results showed special education viewed stakeholder involvement, effective systems and policy, and communication and collaboration as the most effective practices.

High school special education teachers chose stakeholder involvement as the most effective practice followed by systems and policy.

Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) conducted a multistate survey of special education teachers' perception of their transition competencies. The survey included two parts: demographic information, and a survey of participants' perceived levels of preparation, job satisfaction, and the frequency with which they performed specific transition activities in their job. Results from their research indicated that while there were consistent numerical scores overall for each of the categories of preparation, satisfaction, and frequency, there were significant differences between teachers depending on the disability group taught. The participants ranked their overall sense of preparation as being *somewhat unprepared* to *somewhat prepared*. The teachers indicated they were somewhat dissatisfied with their transition training. Teachers responded that they rarely to occasionally engage in transition activities. However, there were significant differences in each of these areas of study when teacher perceptions were examined by the disability groups that teachers taught. Teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities were much more engaged in providing transition services and activities than special education teachers working with students with high-incidence disabilities. The authors speculated that some amount of difference could have been due to the type of preparation program teachers participated in and differences in focus for different types and level of disability. However, the researchers' overall conclusion was that further study of how well teachers were implementing transition services would be of value, especially considering the teachers' overall low ratings of their preparedness to provide

services and how that can impact the outcomes for students (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

In a study of special educator perceptions of transition program components, Collet-Klingenberg and Kolb (2011) surveyed 231 special educator participants in Wisconsin. Participants completed Likert -type questions about eight transition program components' importance and their satisfaction with the implementation of each component. The components were transition, curriculum and employment, independent living, instruction, transportation/mobility, and post-secondary education. The Likert questions were based on a 1-5 point scale with *1 = not important or not satisfied* and *5 = important and very satisfied*. Participants also commented on each component in an open-ended response format.

Collet-Klingenberg and Kolb (2011) reported the lowest levels of respondent satisfaction in sub-categories of each of the eight components. In the transition component,, the lowest scoring category was funding that fosters opportunities for effective student transition. In particular, one participant mentioned the cost of transportation for students to activities beyond the high school campus. Under the curriculum component, the lowest ranking was for time provided for coordination between school and community. With respect to the remaining components, participants were less than satisfied with only four sub-categories, the lowest of which was factors of funding and access to outside school agencies (Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011).

Teacher professional preparation and training is the greatest factor affecting the quality of transition services (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2002; Wandry et al., 2008).

Research into teacher perceptions of transition services has introduced the additional possibility that there are factors beyond teacher professional preparation affecting their practice and keeping them from fully exercising their capabilities (Benitez, Morningstar, & Fry, 2009; Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2009; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008; Park, 2008).

Interestingly, teachers' perceptions of transition services and their role in providing them appear to be related to the extent to which a foundation of effective research-based practices has been established. For example, student development, an area with strong evidence-based support, does not appear as an area of concern in the research of teacher perceptions of transition services. On the other hand, teachers were very concerned with the transition areas of interagency collaboration, family involvement, and program structure, areas where few effective practices were identified in the literature reviews of Test et al., (2009), Cobb and Alwell, (2009), and Landmark, Ju, and Zhang, (2010). This relationship is shown in Table 3, with each school-level study reported herein and the related transition service area of concern as reported. The continued identification of effective practices in the areas with the least amount evidence based research, as suggested by Test et al., (2009), Cobb and Alwell, (2009), and Landmark, Ju, and Zhang, (2010) is an important area of future research. Complementary research that extends our knowledge of school-level transition practices involves contextual barriers in the school setting, the subject of school capacity, the next section in this review.

Table 3. Comparison of findings from field-based research of teacher perspectives of transition services, areas of concern as expressed by participants that require further research

	Student Focused Planning	Student Development	Interagency Collaboration	Family Involvement	Program Structure
Knott and Asselin(1999)			*	*	*
Wandry et al. (2006)				*	*
Wasburn-Moses (2009)	*		*		*
Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008)			*	*	*
Benitez, Morningstar, and Fry (2009)					*
Collet-Klingenburg and Kolb (2011)			*		*

### School Capacity

School capacity offers a framework for understanding the contextual factors that researchers of school-level transition services have uncovered in their studies. Initially created to better understand the variables that allow programmatic reform within a school, school capacity has components that are identifiable in both a theoretical and school-level examination of the challenges of implementing institutional-wide transition programming or an individual student's transition services.

## **Foundations of School Capacity**

Beyond professional preparation and knowledge, there are many factors affecting a teacher's ability to provide transition services. Motivation to create models of school change or reform are based on the recognition that research has often ignored aspects of the education system that directly impact teachers' ability to teach (Goetz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995). Structures within schools, although they shape how people perform, commit to a program or process, are often invisible or taken for granted (Hughes, Copley, Howley, & Meehan, 2005). This might be true of the study of transition services.

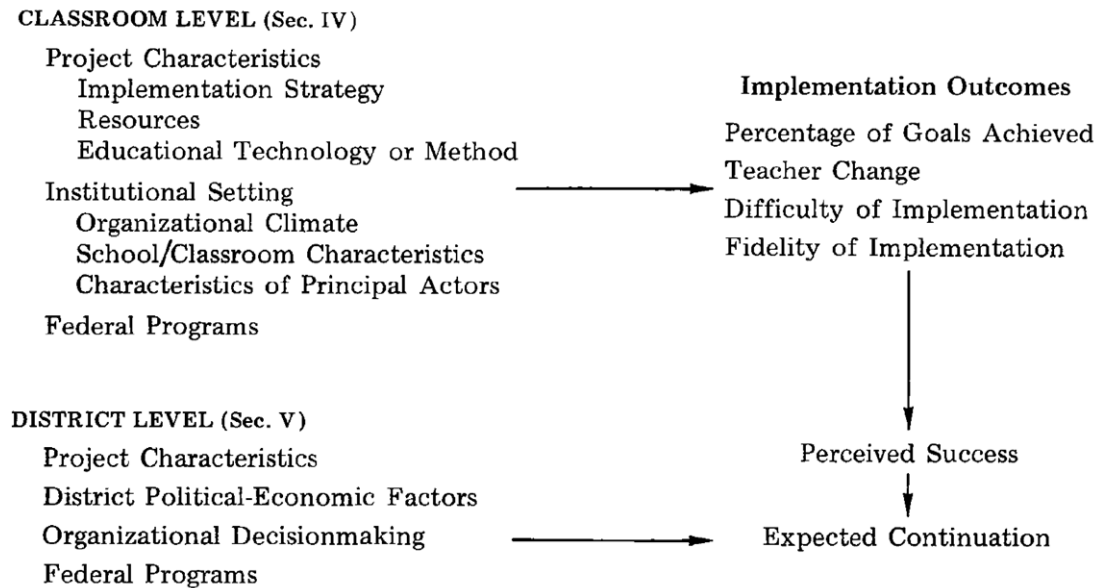
The context which encompasses a single student's transition plan might include multiple institutions, involve external, community-based professionals, and extend for a series of years. The complexity of providing transition services for all students with disabilities requires a broad perspective that takes into account this inherent complexity; namely, the perspective provided by models of systemic school reform.( Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh &Wintrip ,2004; Lehman, Cobb, and Tochtermann , 2001).

Modern school reform as a field of study has examined school level change and program implementation for several decades. In a series of studies in the 1970's examining the implementation of federal programs supporting educational change, Rand Corporation researchers analyzed factors that affect the outcomes and support of implemented programs. The Rand research was focused on federally initiated programs and attempted to examine the implementation process at state, district, school, and classroom levels. The data analysis model of the Rand research shown in Figure 6. notes the variables at the classroom and district level that affect outcomes of a given program.



The classroom level variables include an array of contextual factors found in schools. Identified at the classroom level were independent variables of project characteristics that included the implementation strategy, resources, and educational technology or method employed. Under the variable of institutional setting was included organizational climate, school/classroom characteristics, and characteristics of the principal actors that affected outcomes. The last variable included is the federal program itself as a variable in determining outcomes (Berman and Pauly, 1975).

Figure 6. Data Analysis Model (Berman & Pauly, 1975) p. 45



SRI International performed an evaluation of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Statewide Systemic Initiatives program (SSI) in the 1990's (Zucker, A., Blank, R., & Gross, S., 1995). Their purpose was to analyze NSF's SSI program across multiple sites in states across the country. The evaluation was performed over a period of five years. In

their conceptual model of systemic reforms (see Chapter I, Fig. 3.) they include a two-level picture of implementation factors. The bottom level is the state, region, and district which include the factors of policy, human and material support, professional and public support, standards, and leadership. The top level is the teachers/classroom/school components that consist of actors and outcomes of the activities including teachers, community, school, resources, classroom experiences, and student outcomes. Each of these models of school reform, the Rand model and the SSI model from SRI International lists similar components and divisions between areas of responsibility. In addition, they both listed outcomes as the final stage.

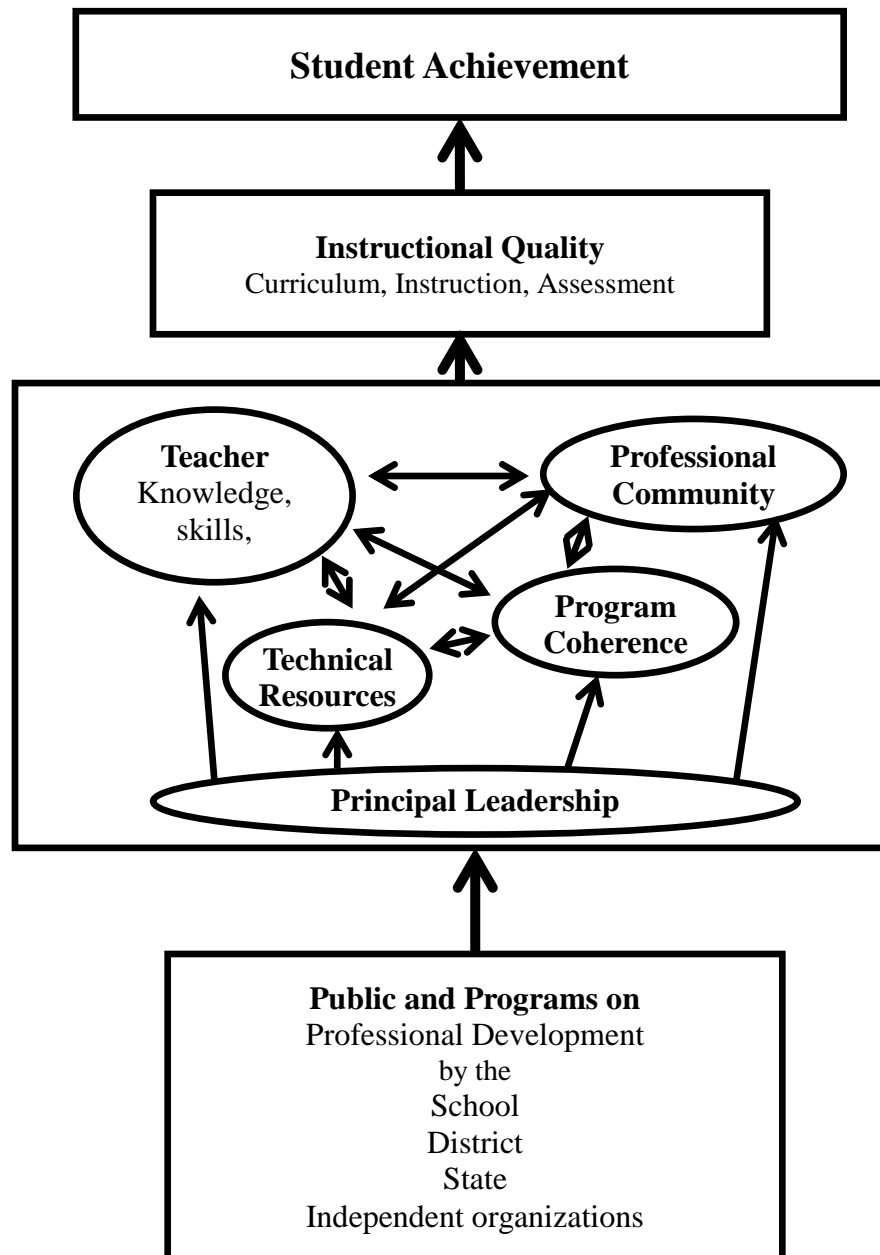
### **Components of School Capacity**

School capacity, as a conceptual model of school reform, is used by Newman, King, and Youngs (2000) as a tool to bring all the factors affecting student achievement into the analysis of school improvement. Their model of school capacity is only one component in a larger model that demonstrates that a series of factors play positive or negative roles in the process of improving student achievement (Fig. 4). It is the interrelationship of these many factors which support the teacher and can lead to positive changes in student achievement (Fig. 7) (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2000).

Fullan (2001) utilized the school capacity model of Newman, King, and Youngs (2001) to explain how to create sustainable large-scale reform. In a four-step procedure, Fullan notes teacher professional development is the first component of school capacity but is limited to the classroom of the trained teacher and warns of sending changed

individuals into an unchanged culture and expecting institutional reform (Fullan, Rolheiser, Mascall, & Edge, 2001).

Figure 7. Factors Influencing School Capacity and Student Achievement. (Newman, King, and Youngs, 2000) p. 262



Secondly, the institutional must undergo development of social and relationship resources that combine with the individual professional development creating professional communities. Thirdly, Fullan suggests that institutions perform a school-wide coordination of the goals of a new program to enhance program coherence and integrate the goals into the organization. The fourth level of school capacity reveals that improving achievement and changing educational methods requires resources such as time, space, materials, equipment, and access to professional coaching or support (Fullan, Rolheiser, Mascall, & Edge, 2001). In the final analysis of school capacity components and sustainable large-scale reform is discussed leadership; without the direction and support of strong school leaders, the previously mentioned four steps will most likely not occur and certainly not be coordinated.

Transition services mimic the broad scope of a systemic school reform in the key components of requiring collaboration between teachers, working with community members and parents, and focusing on student outcomes. The concept of school capacity encompasses a broad array of factors at different levels that are applicable to the activity of providing transition services. Analyzing transition services by utilizing the model of school capacity should aid in understanding these factors.

### **Barriers Related to School Capacity**

Research about transition services has found evidence of barriers related to the context of the school environment. Studies of teacher perspectives of providing transition services have focused primarily on the level of professional preparation of special education teachers. While the professional knowledge and skills have been identified as

the most important factor in providing transition services, research has uncovered the existence of institutional barriers that could impede transition service activity.

Bateman (1996), in a research study of the transition needs of students with behavior disorders found teachers lacked adequate materials and time to teach appropriate skills. The barriers to providing adequate transition services were large caseloads, lack of support personnel, time for collaboration with parents, outside professionals, and community agencies (Bateman, 1996).

In a study of secondary level special education teachers in the state of Virginia, Knott and Asselin (1999) surveyed 217 special education teachers who rated their perceived levels of knowledge, involvement, and importance of transition activities. While teachers rated their involvement in planning transition activities as high, they noted low involvement in the multitude of activities of implementing transition plans (Knott & Asselin, 1999). Community involvement, coordinating with support agencies, collaboration with stakeholders, and working with employers were all ranked as low involvement and are related to teachers' ability to work with factors external to the school. Teachers' ability to be involved in these activities might be due to lack of time and or support for teacher commitments outside of the school building. Unfortunately, the surveyed teachers were not asked to explain why they did not engage in these activities so these reasons are merely speculative.

In an article focused on postsecondary options for student with significant disabilities, Grigal, Neubert, and Moon (2002) reported a list of logistical concerns parents should be aware of that relate to school capacity. The list focuses on teachers

facilitating activities outside of the school and include: *Staffing* (e.g. job coaches or transition specialists), *Transportation* (availability, cost, location), and *Administration* ( e.g. responsibility for facilitating transition services; (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2002).

Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2008) researched teacher perceptions of their proficiency and implementation of transition services. Transition activities were divided into domains and ranked by teachers' feelings of preparedness, satisfaction, and frequency of performing the activities in each domain. While teachers rated the planning of transition activities as the highest frequency activity performed, the lowest ratings from the study were of teachers' likelihood of performing transition activities. Benitez, Morningstar, and Fry (2008) state this result could indicate teachers cannot teach what they do not know. Another explanation might be related to institutional factors that inhibit teachers' ability to provide the transition services. Again, though, this explanation is merely speculative since the teachers weren't asked about this issue.

Teacher candidates were surveyed about their perceptions of barriers to effective transition programming in research by Wandry et al.(2008). Given a pre-test before and then a posttest after a college course on providing transition services, pre-service teachers noted that systemic issues might be major barriers to institutionalizing transition services. Wandry et al. suggest that teachers without proper training to provide transition services might feel helpless when confronted with systemic barriers they cannot overcome. Wandry et al. (2008) suggest that further research be conducted into teachers' sense of systemic helplessness relative to transition planning.

Interviews about transition services conducted with six special educators in an urban high school by Park (2008) revealed concern about a perceived lack of support and resources for stakeholders in the transition process. The participants said the responsibilities of external professionals were unclear and they felt there was a lack of information about external services and resources. Park concluded that the infrastructure in place for transition services was fragile and required more attention to control these issues (Park, 2008).

Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray's (2008) survey about barriers, practices and improvement to transition services directly addressed barriers. 533 special education teachers in the state of Florida were asked three open-ended questions concerning barriers, effective practices, and suggestions for improvements to providing transition services. The questions were: (a) What barriers exist that hinder the transition process?; (b) What effective practices facilitate the transition process?; and (c) What suggestions do you have for improvement of the transition process? The most frequent response to the barrier questions (36% of responses) was lack of resources, followed by lack of stakeholder involvement (35% of responses), systems and policy (25%) and information and resources (24% of respondents). In the portion of the survey where barriers were specifically asked to be identified, the teachers identified external factors that were in context to the school or district setting as the primary barriers, not their knowledge or skills (Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008).

When asked what improvements needed to be made to transition services, resources, systems and policies were again identified most frequently (35% of

respondents). Certainly teachers are aware there are factors beyond their professional knowledge and training in transition services which may be affecting their ability to serve students needs (Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008).

Research into transition services at the school level has reported that factors within the context of the school are affecting teachers' ability to perform transition activities. Studies of teacher knowledge and preparation have stated that future research should investigate the contextual variables that affect transition services (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2002; Knott & Asselin, 1999; Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray, 2008; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008; Park, 2008; Wandry et al. 2008; Wasburn-Moses 2009).

Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) have identified individual components that teachers perceive as contextual barriers to providing transition services. Improving the understanding of these factors and how they fit into the established frameworks of transition services and school capacity could answer questions about contextual variables. There is potential advantage that improved knowledge of contextual variables could provide a direct connection between the two frameworks of transition services and school capacity as there appear to be similarities in their theoretical descriptions. Program structures is one of the major areas included in the Taxonomy of Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996) and has the sub-categories of program philosophy, program policy, strategic planning, program evaluation, resource allocation, and human resource development. These areas in teacher reports of transition might be closely related to the school capacity components of program coherence, professional community, and



technical resources (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2001). Exploring the interrelationship between these sets of contextual factors that the Taxonomy of Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996) and the model of school capacity of Newman, King, and Youngs, (2001) both appear to share could provide insight into understanding and the eventual removal of barriers to providing transition services.

### **Summary**

This literature review has explored three major areas of study, effective transition practices, teacher perception of their knowledge and preparedness, and school capacity. Each of these areas has shown a continuum of development expanding our understanding of transition services or school program reform. Despite an ever growing knowledge-base there are gaps in the literature which deserve further study.

Effective transition practices are continually being expanded but the perspective of school personnel who provide such services at the school-level has not been thoroughly explored. There is a dearth of research examining the state of transition services within individual schools and how to measure the effectiveness of those services. School-level research is needed that will aid evaluation of individual programs.

Exploration of school-level transition services have focused on teacher quality and preparedness and have identified contextual factors as barriers to providing transition services. Clearly, there are other factors that are affecting student outcomes that are outside of teacher knowledge. Research of transition services at the school-level requires a global perspective that examines these school-level variables that teachers do not control which influence student outcomes.

Contextual factors identified by special education researchers bear similarities to the components of school capacity. School reform is a separate field of study however, transition services as an implemented program, fits the model of an implemented system-wide school reform program. School capacity is an appropriate model with which to format and study the factors affecting school-level transition services.

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher and school personnel perceptions of providing transition services to high school students with special needs and to understand the variables that act as facilitators or barriers to providing those services. The perspective of this study is from the point of view of school personnel, examining institutional components, in the format of school capacity. This research should provide greater understanding of the effect of institutional factors on transition services programs and on school personnel's ability provide or facilitate transition services.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore special educators' perceptions of barriers to providing transition services. The goal is to better understand the nature of the barriers and the extent to which they affect teachers' ability to provide effective transition services. The framework of this study is based upon the relationship between the model of transition services known as the Taxonomy of Transition Programming and the model of school reform implementation known as school capacity. This research explores this school-level perspective of the relationship of these models from the perspectives of special education and general education teachers and school counselors. Qualitative research methodology was employed to gather and interpret the data collected.

#### **Design**

According to Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005), qualitative research is conducted "to create evidence based on the exploration of specific contexts and particular individuals." Qualitative research into special education practice is a method that allows for insight, "into the "interplay of complex factors" and into the ways schools, classrooms, teachers, and the like facilitate or hinder the education of children with special needs" (Ghesquière, P. & Van der aalsvoort, M., 2004). Thus,

qualitative research is appropriate for this study of the capacity of high school special educators to provide transition services for students with disabilities.

Qualitative interviewing is flexible and dynamic (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). There are several styles and types of interviews that describe the attributes of the methods chosen by researchers. The style of questioning used in this study is described as semi-structured (Merriman, 2001). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with high school educators and school counselors who work with students with disabilities to create and implement transition plans. Maxwell (2005) describes the differences between structured and semi-structured interviews in this way; structured interviews are helpful in describing the differences *between* phenomenon, this contrasts unstructured interviews which focus on a *single* phenomenon from *differing perspectives*. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to add and create questions in reaction to a participant's responses, as specific information is desired from the participants (Merriman, 2001). In this study, the goal is to understand the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of transition services in their school. Questions were asked to prompt the participants to share deeper personal information than a closed-ended survey question might elicit, but still keep the goal of the study in focus.

In-depth interviewing describes the level of inquiry into the participant's understanding of the phenomenon of transition services in this study. In-depth interviews are defined by repeated face-to-face encounters with researchers and are directed toward understanding the participants' perspectives of the experience and situation in their own words, (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In-depth interviews are conversational and

participant's perspectives unfold naturally as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The information gathered from the participants was analyzed for themes from both the Taxonomy of Transition Programming and school capacity. The data collected should allow an understanding of transition services from the perspective of the study participants that includes the affect of contextual factors that may adversely affect the quality of transition services provided. By putting transition services into the perspective of a process integrated within all variables of an institution, as the conceptual framework of school capacity does, the understandings derived can be applied to reduce these barriers. This chapter will describe the design and methods and that were employed in this study.

This research explores these questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the nature and extent of the *facilitating factors* and *barriers* to providing transition services that are related to school capacity?
2. How do these school capacity related facilitators and barriers affect different aspects of the process of providing transition services?
3. What are teacher and administrator recommendations for improving how transition services are provided in their school and how do these relate to school capacity?

### **Sample**

There are three types of participants in this study. The primary participants of the study are special education high school teachers who are responsible for developing and

implementing transition plans for students with disabilities. To increase the validity of this study, two other school-level participants are to be included. General education teachers that have students with disabilities in their classes. General education teachers are required members of IEP teams and should have knowledge of the transition plans of students whose IEP teams they belong to as members. School counselors are included as they provide career and college counseling to students, assess career interests and assist students with scheduling courses that fit their goals. Principals or assistant principals were invited to participate as they have responsibilities that include student and teacher scheduling and oversight of school resources, and may serve as the local educational agency representative on student IEP teams. Because of their leadership role and responsibilities, principals and assistant principals were to be included in the study based on access to them and their willingness to participate. Including the perspectives of the general education teachers and school counselors will broaden the perspective of transition services at a school and deepen understanding of the phenomenon.

A convenience sample of these participants was recruited through high school administrators and the director of special education services in appropriate and available sites. The initial invitation to participate in the research was delivered via email by the director of special education for each district. This method yielded one response from one special education teacher at each district. Permission to send individual email invitations directly to special education teachers by the researcher was obtained and this method yielded three more responses from special education teachers at one school and a single positive reply from the other. General education teachers and school counselor

participants were recommended by early respondents and were contacted via email by the researcher. Appointments were arranged exclusively via an email exchange. One participant requested more detailed information before agreeing to meet, this instance was attributed to unease regarding the participant's knowledge of the topic and to a lesser degree anonymity and confidentiality concern.

Assistant principals and principals were invited to participate via email initially. After no responses were received the researcher stopped in the main office of each school and directly asked the assistant principals' administrative assistants if an appointment could be made to discuss the research and the possibility of interviewing the assistant principal. This method of directly asking for a face to face meeting to inform and invite was met with a response of "no" at both schools. Again, this method of asking for an appointment directly was made for the *principal* of each school and likewise the response was no, and no appointment was allowed to be made. At the district in which the researcher resides, contacting the superintendent was attempted by initially emailing and asking for a short appointment to discuss the research and report the progress of the data collection. There was no response to the email. A second email was sent in hopes of reaching the superintendent and no response was received. As part of due diligence, the researcher called the superintendent's administrative assistant as no direct phone number was available for the superintendent. Five messages were left with a request for a return call along with a request for a short appointment. No call back from the superintendent's office was received. Finally, the researcher went to the district office in-person and asked

the superintendent's administrative assistant for an appointment. The administrative assistant said that no appointment would be allowed.

The final participants were six special educators, four general education teachers, and four school counselors. Regarding the rate of response for special educators, in one school, four of eleven special education teachers participated representing 36.4% of the special education staff, at the other school, two of eight participated for a response rate of 25%. Direct invitation of general education teachers and school counselors was a 100% positive response while direct appeal response to school leadership was a rate of 0%. Two of three school counselors from B-ville participated and two of five school counselors from A-ville participated in the study. Overall rate of participation as a percentage of those sharing the same professional role was much lower for general education teachers in each school. Only two of 75 general education teachers from B-ville and two of 117 from A-ville High School participated in the study.

The course and grade assignments for the special education teachers were spread among 9-12 grades with a majority (four) of the teachers working primarily with 9th and 10th graders. Five of the special education teacher's co-taught as well as had resource classroom responsibilities. One special education teacher taught only in a pull-out resource classroom. The general education teachers taught students of all grade levels. Two taught science classes, one taught business and career courses. The school counselors all had responsibilities for 11th and 12th grade students and specific responsibility for students with special needs, such as the roster of all students in life-



skills courses. Overall, the participants represented a wide array of experience and responsibility for students of all capabilities and grade levels.

In a study of the contextual factors that affect teacher activities it is important to describe the district and school sites in which their experiences have transpired. In this research, the participants are employed at two different schools in separate school districts. The two sites at which the participants worked represent different demographics. Sites are referred to by an alias to preserve the anonymity of the participants. The site known as B-ville High is the only high school of a rural school district comprised of several small communities. In 2012, there were 943 students attending B-ville high. B-ville High has a graduation rate for students with special needs of 88%. This graduation rate is actually higher than the overall student rate of graduation which is 86%. Eight of the participants worked at B-ville High School.

The second site, A-ville High is classified as being in a town-fringe census area. A-ville High is the only high school within the district which is comprised of a small city and several smaller communities. A-ville High school had 1462 students in 2012 and the graduation rate for students with special needs was 64%. This graduation rate is below the overall student graduation rate of 91% at A-ville High. Six of the participants work at A-ville High School.

It is important to note that during the process of data collection the researcher learned both schools belong to a state sponsored regional consortium that has been implementing a major professional development program to improve the schools' ability to meet Indicator 13 criteria. Indicator 13 is a component of the State Performance Plan

(SPP) compliance process from the U. S. Department of Education through the Office of Special Education and is focused on transition services being included within a student's IEP. Focused on meeting a criteria of performance regarding IEP creation and transition service delivery, the two research sites have been receiving specific professional development regarding transition services. However, the research sites were members of different cohorts of the professional development series and have received different amounts of support over different periods of time. B-ville has been involved in the professional development as a member of cohort 1 and has been receiving support for three years. A-ville is in a later cohort and has only 18 months of professional development focused on Indicator 13. In comparisons of responses between schools, it is important to consider this factor.

### **Data Collection**

To ensure effectiveness of the data collection methods, a pilot test of the interview questions and protocol was conducted at a local school district within a single high school. The director of special education services agreed to assist finding appropriate subjects and high school teachers were invited to participate. Initial contact was made with one teacher and an interview was arranged. During the session with this first teacher they were asked if there were other teachers, both general and special education, who might be interested in participating. This inquiry for participants led to two general and one special education teacher contacting the researcher via email and arranging times for interviews.

After a short introduction, each interview began with a request for basic demographic information about the participant's highest professional degree attained, total years teaching, and years teaching at this particular school. All participants answered these questions freely and were willing to add more detail to their responses than the question implored. The initial grand tour question, "tell me about transition services at your school" prompted lengthy in-depth responses from each of the teachers with an average time of 11 minutes for each. The next level of question was more specific, asking the teachers to describe an instance when a student's transition plan was effective. The follow up question asked the teachers to describe an instance when a student's transition plan was not effective. Mini-tour questions were asked exploring each of the themes of the taxonomy of transition programming. In every instance, teachers' responses were given freely and minimal prompting was required to elicit in-depth answers. The data collected from the pilot interviews meets the requirements of being on-topic and with appropriate length and depth to perform analysis and code within the themes of this study.

Each interview took place at a time and place of the participant's choosing. Following the suggested process from Taylor and Bogdan (1984), interviews generally began with the researcher explaining the process of collecting the data, the focus of the research, noting others within the school were being included, details of the consent agreement, and the participant would have the opportunity to review their responses before their inclusion in the study (member checking). Time spent with each participant was generally an hour, two appointments stretched to an hour and a half. All participants

were forthcoming in responding to questions; only once did a question yield no response. Participants all exhibited energy and enthusiasm in responding, this despite that most interviews took place after the school day. It is the researcher's judgment based on observation of the participants and the nature of their responses that they were answering honestly and giving unguarded replies to all queries.

As noted, data collection was conducted by face to face interviews and email to collect an adequate sample of information from the participants. Semi-structured inquiry at a level of in-depth interviewing with individuals was the primary method. Marshall and Rossman (2006), state that in-depth interviewing is conversational and a few general topics are discussed to begin the process of uncovering the participant's perspectives. The participants' understanding of topics unfolds in the narrative. Researchers are led by the responses to new information. This process conveys to the participant that their perspective and opinions are valued (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Inquiry and dialogue via email must be considered as a viable supplement if participant is willing to extend their availability beyond the face-to-face meetings.

The interview protocol included three grand tour questions that allowed the participants to describe their experience of transition services in their school. Five questions directly related to the components of school capacity and their affect upon transition services at the school were asked, and a final question requesting recommendations for improving transition services completed the interview. The researcher asked follow-up questions during the interviews to acquire more depth of responses or to explore themes related to the overall research focus.

Digital recordings were made of each interaction with the participants' specific permission to do so. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a system of identification using only the school, professional role, and sequence was employed for each completed transcription. No participant's identity was revealed to any other participant and extreme discretion was used to maintain participant confidentiality while checking-in and out of school premises. Early participants were asked for their recommendations of "whom to talk with" and no report was given to the recommender whether an invitation to participate was given or accepted. During interviews, no reference was made about other participants or their responses.

The form of inquiry that was followed is described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), as theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling allows data to "explain" concepts. In using theoretical sampling the perspective of educators at the school level was used to explain the relationship between the model of transition services and the model of school capacity. Analysis of the responses began immediately and continued until the data collected was sufficient to describe the participants' perspective of transition services (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The focus of the research, transition services, was introduced using a grand tour question asking, "tell me about transition services?" Follow-up or mini-tour questions were formulated from the participant responses either extemporaneously by the researcher, after a review of responses at the end of that interview, via email (with the permission and understanding of the participant) or in further face to face interview sessions.

Mini-tour questions would target responses to a grand tour question that implied themes of transition services and school capacity or revealed factors that supported or restricted the ability to provide transition services. As an example, a teacher might say, "I wish I could take my student(s) to the community college to sit in on classes there to see what it is like." This response appears to be associated with two components of the Taxonomy of Transition Programming, interagency collaboration and program supports. A follow up question would be required to explore whether the issue is due to: a lack of relationship with the community college (interagency collaboration), or access to transportation (program support - resources), or possibly scheduling for an off-campus trip that would mean students would miss classes (program structure - curriculum standards). Follow up questions would be worded to gain more information from the participants regarding themes related to components in either the Taxonomy for Transition Programming or School Capacity. In Table 4. are example mini-tour questions specific to the components of school capacity.

Table 4. School Capacity components and potential mini-tour questions.

School Capacity Component	Example of mini-tour questions
Teacher knowledge, skills, dispositions	Describe how your professional preparation affects how you provide transition services?
Professional community	Describe how other faculty and staff at your school affect transition services
Technical resources	Describe how resources at your school affect transition services?
Program Coherence	Describe how transition services are provided to students during their tenure at your school.
Principal leadership	Describe how leadership at your school affects transition services?

To verify the effectiveness of these methods and accuracy of the questioning, pilot interviews were conducted at a third school site. Grand tour questions and mini-tour questions were tested to determine if the responses were focused on the topics of the study's conceptual framework and the whether they had a quality of depth and insight that is required to generate meaningful conclusions after analysis. Data collected during the pilot study was rich and gave sufficient evidence to answer the proposed research questions. Teacher response to the entire process, from initial invitation through the completion of the interview were cordial and without apparent reluctance to answer honestly and without hesitation. No data collected in the pilot interviews is included in the findings of this study or any published report.

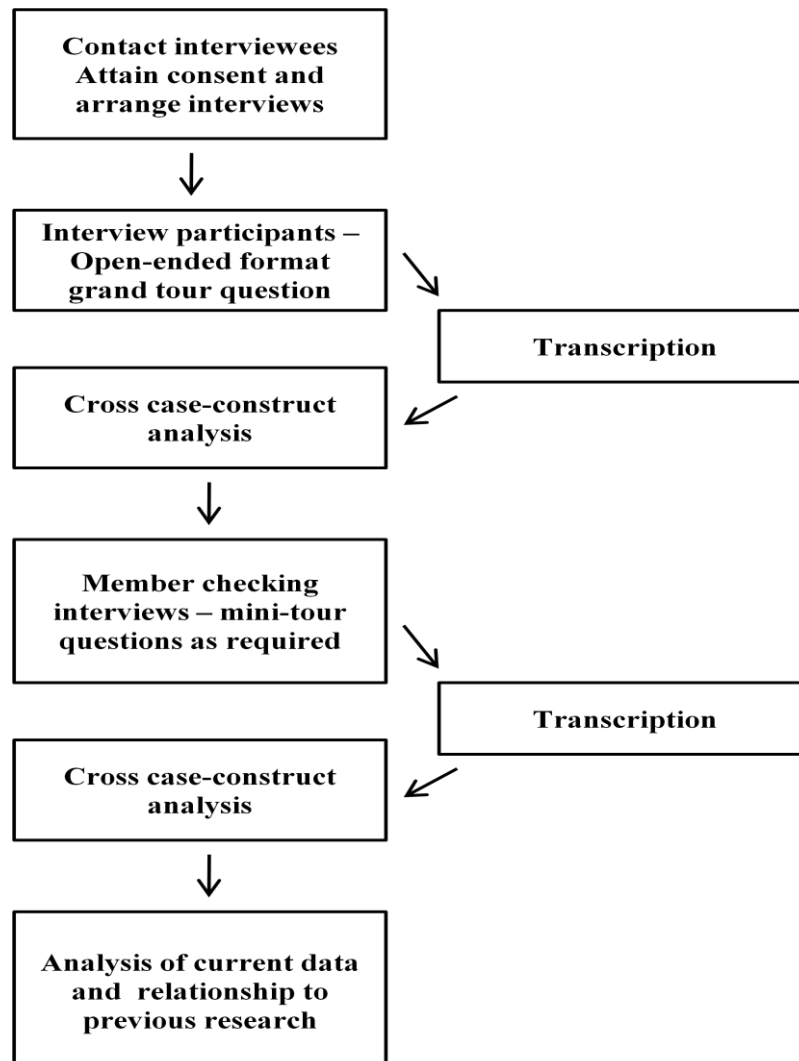
### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the survey WERE analyzed using methods described by Attride-Stirling (2001) and those of Miles and Huberman, (1994). Attride-Stirling suggests the use of thematic networks facilitates the exploration of themes in qualitative data and assists organizing them into stratified relationships of themes and sub-themes. The goal WAS to systematize the extraction of lowest order themes, organizing themes and global themes into an understandable construct. Thematic networks are often depicted as a web diagram to represent the levels of themes within the construct. In this research there is the participants' perception of the relationship between two constructs being explored; Kohler's Taxonomy of Transition Programming (1996) and the model of School Capacity of Newman and King (2001). While the themes in each construct are defined, how the reports of educators and administrator in this study fit within these

themes IS an important part of this study. The use of thematic networks was used as a method of understanding the interaction of these two constructs as experienced by school level educators and administrators.

Data collected from participants WERE coded using methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Figure 8. is a flowchart showing the process of data analysis for this study.

Figure 8. Flowchart Qualitative Analysis Process.





A cross-case construct table was utilized to compare the participant responses of the interview with themes of barriers they introduce. Distinctive or similar factors in themes was analyzed and presented in table format.

Responses between participants were compared in regard to their professional role and research site which they are employed. Data were presented in table format and analyzed for relationships between cases, and between themes within the components of the Taxonomy of Transition Programming and school capacity. Member checks were conducted after the initial interview had been transcribed and analyzed. The investigator reviewed responses with each participant and verified the validity of the response. Follow-up questions related to the participants' perceptions of the work-place support elements were asked as necessary.

The third stage of analysis was to seek possible relationships between findings of previous research and current discoveries. A cross-case meta-matrix was developed to aid comparison of each research study of teacher's perceptions of barriers to transition and the data collected from this study. Data were recorded in matrices with examples of coding for each theme as derived from participants' responses. Narrative with in-depth description of participant responses illustrates important themes discovered during the research study. Included in the design of this research are four methods to control the validity of the findings. Triangulation was used to confirm the reports of individuals by comparing the perspective of school based phenomenon of the participants. Triangulation was created by using participants who have different roles in the processes of transition services within the same school. Member checks were performed to confirm their

responses are as they reported and the researcher's interpretation of their meaning are consistent with the thoughts and ideas they expressed. Interviews occurred over a period of time and on more than one occasion for some participants. This allowed participants to consider the questions and their responses giving them the opportunity to clarify their responses and add more information. Researcher bias is recognized as a potential threat to validity. The researcher's background in relation to this research is presented in this study.

### **Summary**

Post-school outcomes for students with disabilities have not attained the same level of positive result as their non-disabled peers despite the mandate of a transition plan for every student aged 16 years and older as part of their IEP (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Dunn, 1996; Rojewski, 1999). Inquiry into this phenomenon has looked at the major variables that affect the provision of transition services. Research into transition services has identified effective practices that should meet the needs of those students with transition plans (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Test et al., 2009). Studies that examine teacher preparedness have found that while teacher knowledge is the most important factor affecting student outcomes, there are other factors that are affecting transition services (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2002; Knott & Asselin, 1999; Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray, 2008; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008; Park, 2008; Wandry et al. 2008; Wasburn-Moses 2009).

This study used qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of high school level special education and general education teachers and administrators regarding the facilitating factors and barriers to providing transition services in their school. Utilizing a semi-structured format of questions the researcher conducted in-depth interviews exploring the unique perspectives of participants. Two separate high schools were used to compare similarities and differences of factors that participants report as affecting transition services in their school. Data were coded and analyzed to determine the facilitating factors and barriers of school capacity and conclusions were made how these factors can be remediated at the school level and what further research must be conducted to address the issue of poor post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher perspective of providing transition services to high school students with special needs and to understand the variables that act as facilitators or barriers to providing those services. This chapter presents the overall structure of the study, a description of the analysis process, and the findings organized by construct of school capacity.

This research employed two conceptual frameworks to give structure to the process of providing transition services: school capacity, a model of elements required for implementing program reform within schools, and the transition taxonomy a model that describes six major components of transition services. Through interviews of special educators, general educators, and guidance counselors in two high schools in two different school districts, this research means to explain and align teachers' practical reality with the theoretical models that represent the context variables and the transition service activities that occur within their school environment. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the nature and extent of the *facilitating factors* and *barriers* to providing transition services that are related to school capacity?

2. How do these school capacity related facilitators and barriers affect different aspects of the process of providing transition services?
3. What are teacher and administrator recommendations for improving how transition services are provided in their school and how do these relate to school capacity?

The coded data were analyzed in three different forms: as an aggregate response to discern the relationship of school capacity to transition taxonomy; between roles to see if special educators, general education teachers, and school counselor share or differ in their experience; and within schools to compare the experience between two settings with differing contexts. Participant responses that were not pertinent to the question asked nor reflected any connection to the topics of school capacity or the transition taxonomy were not included in the analysis.

Reliability was addressed using three methods. Participants' input was included via member checks with completed transcripts reviewed by participants. They were invited to add, edit, or remove any portion of the interview transcript. Only minor deletions were requested by two participants. An additional quality check included having coded data reviewed for accuracy and bias by two doctoral-level special education peers; only minor additions were suggested which did not alter the results or interpretation of data.

The fact that participants represented three separate roles within their schools and different responsibilities within the process of providing transition services was useful to triangulate the findings. Analysis showed that while there were differences between the

experiences of participants according to their professional role within the school, those differences were not significant. When data were compiled and examined by school, there were marked differences in responses that provided a better understanding of the interaction of school capacity with transition activities. It is not the purpose of this research to examine differences between schools; however, the variation between the two is an important factor that deserves some attention as it speaks to the power of program implementation as a method to create improved school outcomes.

### **A Tale of Two Schools**

The circumstance that the participating schools are at different stages of program implementation supports the interaction of school capacity components with the ability to provide transition services. In this section, participants' responses are examined by their alignment with school capacity components. There are differences between the responses by site that represent the presence *or* absence of a school capacity component and *still* support their connection to transition services. On the personal level of teachers, there is a common thread; the participants in every role, in each school, display commitment to the students. The commitment is heard in their frustration with student goals unmet, their recalling the challenges of attempts to engage families in the transition process, and pride in helping students achieve their goals.

The difference between A-ville and B-ville is best understood and demonstrated by each school's participants' responses to the interview's initial open-ended statement: "Tell me about transition services at your school." Their responses to this question illuminate how an additional 18 months of time with professional development and

program support created program coherence, and, that in turn, made transition services at one school a systemic pervasive goal for students instead of a solo responsibility for each professional staff member.

At B-ville, the school in its third year of program implementation, participants began talking about processes and coordinated activities. They describe elements of the program. This general education science teacher at B-ville explains some of the process of transition services in their school:

At B-ville, we sit down with our learning support kids and we have an intake form which we have to fill out on our IEP students. It says, "How does your course meet the transition goals of the student?" It is two questions at the top of our input page. So, how can we help transition between that high school and also college? We fill that out and a lot of times and we are talking about a student and what they, the student, wants to do. And they want to be in the medical field of course, they came to the biology teacher, anatomy teacher, the micro teacher. So, we discussed what she *should* be doing here so that it will help her get into that secondary training and we talked about going down to the local vet and doing some volunteering. Making sure, she gets those hours to make sure, she can put that on her application. Even though she is just in 10th grade. That's where we want to go. We want to make sure that the kids after here have a goal and a plan. What are they going to do and we start that in 9th or 10th grade.

The participant describes the transition process from the perspective of a general education teacher beginning with the completion of an intake form that is used in the student's IEP meeting to connect the student goal to the content of that teacher's class. The understanding of the teacher goes beyond the required form; understands that the goal is to fit the student's education to her goals and the goals go beyond the semester the student is in that course and continue beyond graduation. In the description of transition

services, the teacher provides evidence of an integrated process that also demonstrates the existence of program coherence.

From a special education teacher at B-ville, her description of transition services:

Well I'm really excited about what we do here because, I think what we do here is exactly what we *need* to be doing. Our biggest problem is that we don't document it and that is the part that we are not doing well, in regards to writing IEPs. We provide a lot of services, but there are things that we do just because they are best practices and we don't think of them as transition services. For example, we have a college fair that is not just a college fair. We bring in outside agencies like OVR (office of vocational rehabilitation) and XXXX agency that kids that aren't going to take advantage of colleges but they can take advantage of that opportunity and can go and make connections with agencies that they are going to use after high school. We present that opportunity but we don't think of them as a service we are providing. (Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)

This teacher's answer to the question, "tell me about transition services at your school." starts with an expression of pride in the process. Dismissing the collective informational events such as college fairs which students are provided as typical and often not included in student IEP's because they don't represent a service to the individual, this teacher sets an expectation that what is included in a student's IEP is truly special for that student and their needs.

Another general education teacher at B-ville described an array of transition services at the school that are offered to every student at the school:

I know we have transition services through learning support, which is written into the IEP, but we also offer a lot of transition services through the career coordinator at the school. We allow students to start working if they choose to in their junior year. They can choose to do internships their senior. We have a college academy where we have students that attend some of the gen ed. college courses at XXXXU and XXXX community college. We have a lot of what we



call career exploration opportunities for students.(Interview, B-ville General Education Teacher)

The provision of transition services for students with special needs is in *addition* to providing student- specific opportunities leading to student goals. The participants at B-ville describe a program and process which is institutionalized for all students and, despite being extensive, is not always included on student IEPs because it is the *norm* and not a *special* service.

A-ville's transition program implementation is only 18 months old. The participants' responses are related somewhat to transition services but do not share the sameness of a systemic procedure or awareness. This special education teacher at A-ville answers the broad transition services query:

Our focus has recently changed in this last year. There has been a huge push through the intermediate units to reexamine our transition and our IEPs and to make sure that we are a little more thorough and a little more concise with our students in that regard.

Researcher: Do you think they are looking for compliance or deeper transition experiences or both?

A little bit of both, I think it started because of compliance and the more they looked at it they realized that we were probably lacking in some areas for some students. From a teacher perspective, some of us are considering this overkill for some of our students. So our students who truly need it, are needy by all means, we would go to the ends of the earth to try and get all of them all they need for transition. On the other hand, for students that I serve that may be "monitor only" that may be college bound anyway, we have the supports "in place". It may be overkill from our perspective. Why do we need to do this, their functioning at a regular ed. level? Why are we killing ourselves to provide transition services when they are already on track and they are progressing like a regular ed. student would and isn't that what we want after all? (Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

Transition service activity is cited in this passage; however, the response is not indicative of a systematic process. This response did not go to the heart of transition and talk about student goals or the process to meet them. Another special education teacher at A-ville responded this way:

Transition services at our school deal primarily with the IEP with the child's interest in what they want to be when they grow up. We try to ask them what is their plans, how do they decide to get there. How capable they are we might conduct interest surveys with my students I have them go to a website where they can take an interest survey and from there they can explore different careers. I did this as part of their English class. They will be writing research papers and journal entries.

Researcher: So, you put it right into your curriculum?

Yes, I have to. Otherwise, we wouldn't have time to do that and with the students who are mainstreamed, since I don't see them on a regular basis except when I grab them in the hallway. Most of them, because they are mainstreamed and successful . . . and they are mainstreamed *because* they have been successful, they already have a pretty good idea of what they want and where they are headed and how to get there. These students have their act together sufficiently.(Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

The response is about transition services, but limited to what *this* teacher is doing for the students, not how other teachers address the fit between the content of their courses and students' transition goals. There is no suggestion that transition services have continuity beyond this teacher.

A third example of the lack of program coherence from an A-ville general education teacher who works with students in the gifted and AP (Advanced Placement) programs:

Honest to god, I'm not sure I can, I know you'd probably know or not from where you've come into the school, the program for the gifted and talented program are completely separate from the rest of special education. We don't go to the same meetings, we have the same boss, but that is the only place we intersect. We five who do gifted and talented for the whole district really have no cohesion, no program to speak of. We are sort of just out there. I frankly don't have a clue what the rest of special education is doing to help students transition. I know what the guidance office here does in general in terms of helping with college search and transcripts and things like that, but beyond that, I honestly don't know.

Researcher: Is there any overlap between students that you work with that also qualify for IEPs, those students who might be performing academically as gifted but have a reading disability or something?

In general, I might have one of those a year, I have about 62 students on my class load and I might have one at a time. That's it, mostly not. Sometimes I have a kid with a speech and language IEP that persists through high school. I started here at the middle school and there I had more students with speech and language IEPs, they tend to transition them out and they don't tend to have them at the high school. Right now, I have one kid who has an LD (Learning Disability) IEP and he's the only one on my roster and he's been the only one on my roster for the last two years. Same kid, he's a senior this year. I don't get invited to those meetings, the IEP meetings. I have to sign them, but in general, I don't get invited to the meetings.

Researcher: So, you aren't really part of his plan?

Nope, I'm sure he has a plan, but I don't know what it is. (Interview, A-ville General Education Teacher)

A general education science teacher at A-ville responds to the question about change in transition services during her tenure at the school. In much the same way as others at the school, describing the interaction with her class or course, but not a continuum of service that would extend throughout a student's experience from class to class or grade to grade.

Not really. I think it has been kind of the same besides, other than NCLB coming out, and XXXX's (statewide standardized end of year tests) and things like that. I think it's always been pretty much done the same way. There has been IEPs, in this building there hasn't been a lot of change over, most of the staff has been here

as long as I have. . . I've seen more IEPs I don't know if that's a change, but I'm seeing more students being diagnosed. I think that is because we are learning more about what learning disabilities are. My other issue is, what happens to those kids in the middle.(Interview, A-ville Science Teacher)

School Counselors at A-ville connect transition to their role assessing student career goals and present a somewhat more comprehensive view of a transition program:

Well, we are required as counselors to do an interview with every student each year. This year, I have 11th and 12th graders. I sit down and I've pretty much finished with most of my seniors. We just asked what their plans are after high school. I have across the range of students, those that are just going to get a job right out of HS and students who are going to high level 4 year institutions our school is unique in that we have across the board every type of demographic. SES, not a large amount of minorities but a few and we are required to sit down with them and talk about their future and talk about what they are doing and try to help them to figure out the steps of what that would be and what they would look like for them. We are required to do that once a year, though with most it's a couple time and for some it's 8 or 9 times depends on how sure they are or unsure they are about things. . . We were just in classrooms last week with the option 2 juniors, our college prep juniors, doing presentations on college planning, scheduling SATs and ACTs, that kind of stuff.(Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

This school counselor recognizes that the activities of assessing students career goals and plans for attending college require some amount of support, but no specific activities related to meeting student needs or student development are mentioned. Nothing in this response brings to light a program which follows students through high school and beyond, and nothing that integrates their academic coursework to post-secondary goals is mentioned.

The two sites represent different levels of school capacity. B-ville's program is maturing as demonstrated by the shared understanding of the procedures and goals of

transition services. Participants at B-ville recognized their individual responsibility and the shared responsibility that is required of the institution's process for providing transition services. A-ville's participants' answers did not provide a picture of a continuum of support or of procedures that were universally followed. There is insufficient information to understand if there are factors other than the time since initial implementation as the reason for the different answers. Taking this one known variable into account, does add another dimension to the study that was unforeseen.

### **Program Coherence**

Newman, King, and Youngs (2001) define program coherence as the extent that a school's programs are coordinated, focused on clear goals and sustained over a period of time. Program coherence is a gauge of the institutionalization of a program; it *creates* program consistency between grade levels, and coordination and alignment of curriculum between subject areas (Hughes, Copley, Howley, and Meehan, 2005). Transition services are an excellent indicator of the existence or lack of program coherence. Schools are complicated and transition services require interaction across roles and responsibilities, continuity from grade level to grade level, and access and mobility within the schools and to a variety of outside institutions, agencies, and businesses in order to be effective. Transition services are a complicated program in a complicated environment.

It is not unusual that the most frequently identified theme in participant responses, whether as facilitator or barrier, was related to program coherence. Gauging the most oft-cited theme was achieved by compiling the responses from each interview question and tabulating them into a single matrix. An example grid for Question 2 is shown In Table 5.

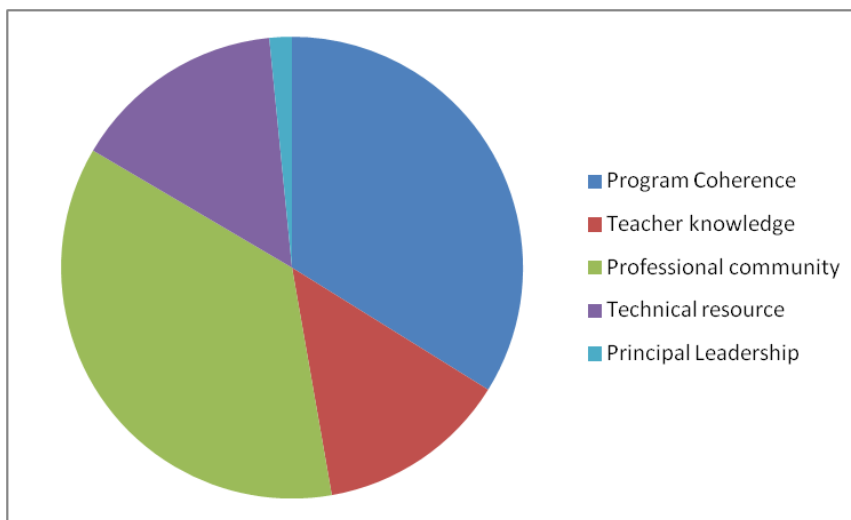
Note the school capacity elements are in the far right column followed by columns to note: (a) whether the comments were describing the element as a facilitator or barrier, (b) the total number of times mentioned, (c) the role of the participant, (d) the number of times per role the element was mentioned, (e) the number of persons in that role who reflected that theme, (f) the ratio of how many participants within a role mentioned the theme to the total number of participants in that role, and, finally, (g) columns for each transition component and the number of times that school capacity element was discussed with that school capacity theme. A matrix was tabulated for each school capacity element to understand the relative amount of focus participants were placing on each as shown in Table 5 the data matrix for question two results on the school capacity components of principal leadership and program coherence.

Table 5. Data analysis matrix. Remarks made of School Capacity Themes and related Transition Taxonomy Components cited per instance.

Interview question #2. Tell me about a time when a student's transition plan was effective. What contributed to that outcome?										
School Capacity component cited	Facilitator Barrier	#	ROLE	Count/ratio		Transition Taxonomy Component Connections				
						Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
Principal Leadership	Facilitator	0	SPED	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			Gen . ed.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			Counselor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Barrier	0	SPED	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			Gen . ed.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			Counselor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Program Coherence	Facilitator	11	SPED	6	4/6	3	2	1	2	3
			Gen . ed.	3	2/4	1	1	1	0	1
			Counselor	2	2/4	2	0	0	1	1
	Barrier	4	SPED	3	2/6	2	0	0	1	1
			Gen . ed.	1	1/4	0	0	0	1	0
			Counselor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 9 represents the aggregated remarks made of each school capacity element. As shown, participants did not discuss school capacity elements equally, but instead mainly focused on program coherence and professional community in their responses; teacher knowledge, technical resources and principal leadership were mentioned, but less often.

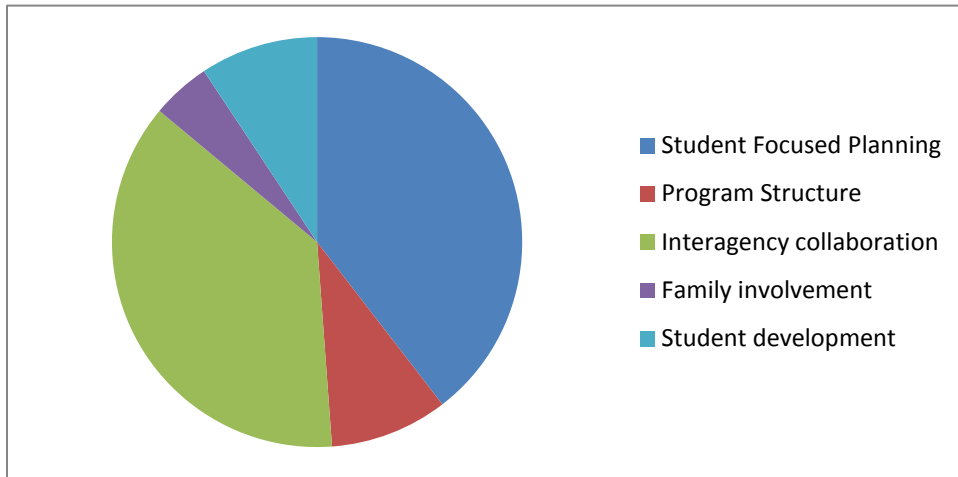
Figure 9. Aggregated remarks made of school capacity elements.



The relative importance of program coherence on transition services is shown in figure 10. The remarks made for each area of school capacity within the interview data collected are shown proportionally. For instance, approximately 40% of the program coherence responses involved the transition service component of student-focused planning. This component was followed closely by the collaboration component of transition services.

Figure 10 is a graphic representation of the participant responses and is used only to understand the proportional influence program coherence has on the themes contained within their answers. The responses of participants tell a story of the widespread importance of program coherence for transition activities in the school.

Figure 10. Program coherence - participant associations by proportion of responses to each component of transition services.



**Program coherence and student focused planning.** Student-focused planning is composed of three elements: IEP development, student participation, and planning strategies. Responses note the importance of the connection of program coherence to these elements. A special education teacher at B-ville High transferred from the middle school this year. Here the teacher describes a student whose IEP the teacher helped develop in 8th grade and that is now being implemented in the high school:

One of my boys is really big into sports. When we wrote his plan in the middle school, sometimes we write plans that aren't that real, and I actually remember when we wrote it down that his interests were football, baseball, sports, all of that kind of stuff. So, we put that in his plan that he was to play football; he wants to do something with sports. They took it up here where he actually going to xxxxx college where he is working in the athletic area where he is helping the head custodian and he's with the grounds keeper and where he's putting the lines on the field, and taking care of the uniforms, and he'd doing this and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh!" That ties together which I wouldn't have thought of last year. Yeah, whatever, football player, just put it down. But they were able to take that information and that is what he likes, we'll put him in there.(Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)



Program coherence is evident in the implementation of the IEP and even the teacher is surprised that the continuity exists between the schools. The student's goals were included in the IEP and a plan created and followed.

This school counselor at A-ville relates a story of a student whose IEP included a career goal of being a gospel singer in Nashville:

I can think of a student who ended up staying here until he was 21, and at the beginning of his career at high school he was very set on the fact that he would be a professional gospel singer and live in Nashville. That was his career goal at 14 or 15 when he arrived at our high school. He was certain that he was going to be doing that. This is young man with Down's syndrome; I don't know if he would be technically tone-deaf, but he struggled with anything musical. He was very firm in that goal. What was beautiful was that goal was always supported because it was important to him. He was in our choirs, he was in private music lessons, those things were supported, but at the same time at each level, there's a transition plan that by force or coercion we'd introduce other things for him to try. "We understand this is our long term goal, but we'd like you to take a look at this." He was encouraged to explore other avenues.(Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

Student participation, IEP development, and planning strategies, elements of student-focused planning, all emerge as part of this story of a student's successful transition.

Suggesting a situation when assessment or student participation has not led to meaningful transition goals, this special education teacher talks about a scenario and type of student who might not have a successful transition:

I can't think of anyone else off the top of my head, but the kids have an unrealistic goal where, you know, I don't know how their transition plans are written, but you know they are unrealistic. Or you know, just have no motivation or something blocking the, not necessarily the transition blocking them, outside forces blocking them from being able to succeed whatever that may be.

This description, filled with frustration, describes the lack of a process for discovering the students' goals and does not bring assessment, or career counseling into the story of discovering what goes wrong with student transition plans. The planning of the IEP is an essential process in creating transition services that are likely to lead to positive student outcomes.

A school counselor describes another student who is not succeeding and the absence of program coherence is implied. The student is disengaged from the school, and it seems by the description as if the school were disengaged from the student:

I think I'm watching one crashing and burning right now. I have this student who was a very late referral for special education and did not get an IEP until his junior year. A very late referral, very late child find experience. He wasn't always in our district. Things were masked in terms of what his needs were. Now, I think honestly, based in part a real sense of defeat, being defeated, learned helplessness within the system he has so little motivation that to have him take ownership of these external goals it's as if everyone else is setting goals for him and he is not grasping on to any of them. I feel like people are almost carrying him to the graduation stage, but once he gets across the stage, my hopes are low. His parents have enabled him to an extent and created an environment, not that the school doesn't have some role to play, because he'd moved here and we didn't identify him for almost two years. He did not make any significant progress on any goals in my mind. (Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

Student-focused planning requires a complex set of components to create an effective transition plan. Having the time and tools to reach out to students, the process to investigate their interests, and the authority to facilitate transition services are all affected. Program coherence is evident when IEP plans are created in middle school and facilitated in high school with consistency, leading to students reaching their goals.

**Program coherence and collaboration.** The transition taxonomy includes two elements within interagency collaboration: a collaborative framework and collaborative service delivery. Transition service delivery must include a collaborative framework within the school as much as with outside agencies. Collaboration within the school among special and general education teachers and school counselors is a crucial element in each step of creating a transition plan; namely, assessment, IEP planning, student involvement, and making the connection with academic courses and personal transition goals. Collaboration is also evident with outside agencies that offer and provide services for students that prepare them for post-secondary work, education, and independent living. Both internal and external collaboration is included in the participants' responses related to program coherence.

In describing a typical IEP meeting and the collaboration that was evident in it, this special education teacher describes the level of involvement of others and how she was not used to the team approach at schools where she had previously taught.

It is a team approach and I think it is invaluable. I really say that coming here, because I came from another district, the first time I walked into an IEP meeting and there was an LEA there, AND a guidance counselor. The guidance counselor and the LEAs attend every IEP meeting unless there is a serious scheduling conflict that they cannot make it. I was so floored by that; I was not used to that, and I was used to flying on my own at these meetings and it is so great because the guidance counselors can talk about the courses and what they need to get there. Not just one voice explaining this to the student and the parents, but it is many voices, a team approach. They have input from every teacher for every meeting. They write a paragraph of what they see in their classroom, because what they see in their classroom might be different that what I see in mine. That student might appear to be unmotivated with all F's except in one class in which he's doing great. So, what is that teacher doing right? Something that the rest of us aren't doing? Maybe not wrong, but what other factors are helping that teacher

reach that child; and that is what we are looking at.(Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

Contrasting her previous experience, at this school, attendance at IEP meetings of all school stakeholders is expected and part of the institutional process.

A school counselor at A-ville explains how the presence of collaborative relationships helped a student succeed. She explained working with the regional vocational tech school and coordinating a student's post-secondary goals with resources beyond the high school that helped the student get a job offer *before* graduation and immediately begin working full-time:

Number one, the kid knowing from the get-go that he had a career goal and that we were able to foster that career goal in a real way. He wanted to do construction. He knew people that had done construction, so we were able to give him resources through vo-tech of learning carpentry and learning that skill set. We were able to bolster that feeling of being able to do that; having great coordination here *and* there, and to be able to keep his grades at a stable point. He was able to get into the classes he needed here in terms of team-taught and learning support coursework. To get through the requirements and then, I think a lot also that contributed was working with his special ed. teacher on job skills, resume, all of those things making sure with his special ed. teacher, that all that was put together. When he was ready to apply, he had all the skills he needed and the professional look that he needed to. (Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

This response shows that program coordination is an institutionalized expectation, that "this is how it is supposed to work," and working together is not an exception or special situation.

This special education teacher responds to a question as to whether they are having students conduct their own IEP meetings. In her answer, she describes the breadth

and depth of services beyond the school that are available to the students and how that factor alone, too much choice, could be a problem for student-run meetings:

The kids I have this year I think are too low functioning for that. It would be nice, but I don't think they could do that. We could get their input, we could ask them questions, but for them to actually lead it, I don't think that's a realistic option at this point.

I can see where there'd be issues where transition services you can offer at their level are so sophisticated, are such with job placement and job training that it would be hard for students to understand all of that. It also it that, as you get all of this information and the agencies are involved and your head just kind of spins for awhile. And I could see where theirs would spin too, and just the idea that asking the agencies to come to the meetings and that part too, do I have to do this. Yet, once I see, it does make sense that we invite them to transition meetings because the OVR is able to have more resources that they can place them in their jobs. (Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)

**Program coherence and program structure.** Program structure for transition includes program philosophy, policy, strategic planning, program evaluation, resource allocation, and human resource development. Program coherence is the foundation of program structure within the school and the effect of program coherence on transition services is revealed in participants' stories about changes in how transition services have changed during their tenure at that school.

This special education teacher at A-ville describes the change in how transition services are provided.

It was pretty non-existent when I came here 15 years ago, it was something that was mentioned slightly in the IEP but particularly, for my higher-level students, it wasn't anything we really looked at addressing. Our kids were capable of securing jobs on their own, and if they weren't, we worked with them through the counseling department, most of the time to get steering them in the right direction. Obviously, with the change in compliance, we are trying to visit that more

thoroughly. Has it changed in the year that we've done it? Not so much yet , it's always been the more special need kids, we definitely zeroing in on them. If we feel the kid can do it independently, then by all means I think that they should.(Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

The current transition program implementation is included in this description but the perception is that it has not created any change in how the actual services are performed. The special education teacher is as confident of the outcomes as previously, but there is no detail to the actual explanation of the transition services provided beyond the IEP transition plan creation.

Here a school counselor at B-ville describes his perception of how transition services have changed while at the school.

I think on the special ed. side they have become much more goal oriented. My first year, I felt the IEPs were written much more for, "you're in high school, this is what we can do to help you be in high school and be successful" kind of concept. Now, it's "how can we help you be successful in high school while you are working on this goal, which is clearly stated and clearly labeled." You have said, "student X that you want to do Y. Here's what we are going to do in high school to help you be successful, but here is also how this is going to help you be successful out there." It makes it a bigger picture. I think for a while high school had a time stamp and that was the IEP, and then it was "best of luck". (Interview, B-ville School Counselor)

This answer portrays transition services transformed from being focused on compliance, to discovering and supporting students as they work towards attaining their goals.

Program coherence is the foundation for program structure to be created.

**The absence of program coherence as a barrier.** Program coherence, when not in sufficient amounts to regulate or stimulate process, can be a barrier to providing transition services. Participants most closely associated the lack of program coherence

with student-focused planning. A special education teacher at A-ville describes the transition service involvement of other faculty at the school in this way:

They honestly don't have much input. If it is a vocational teacher, they will definitely by all means, especially within the IEP meeting itself. They can provide a lot of detailed information about what the skills are, what the needs are, where they see the child heading, they can help us steer where they are going. They can also tell us where the student is earning any certificates. A lot of kids can walk out of here if you are in the technology strand, they can walk out of here with a Cisco certification right out of high school. They are employable. They help us know where the child is earning those things, or where they are going or what specialty they are filtering through to. Regular ed. teachers, English, Social studies, Science, not so much, one of them will attend the IEP meeting and provide us some information, but not about transition. Principals, not so much. (Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

A general education teacher at A-ville describes how other faculty and staff affect transition services as a struggle with the Common Core Curriculum. Teachers are trained to focus on their content area and not necessarily to relate it to student needs.

Not in any good concrete ways. I think it's pretty haphazard. Most faculty who are working with kids are doing the best they can to help kids have the skills that they need to be successful for when they get out of here. But, I think they are doing it by gut reaction rather than because someone says, "this is what you are to do." I think that maybe it is part of the thinking, but this Common Core stuff that we are starting to be trained in, the outcome, goal of Common Core is quite specifically career or college career ready. I won't be surprised if we don't get more structure around what we are supposed to do, because, we're doing this common core thing. (Interview, A-ville General Education Teacher)

These two examples make a connection between the need for structure including a procedure to include general education teachers in the planning process for students and to tie the curriculum of content courses to students' post-secondary goals.

Finally, program coherence provides the structure and foundation that allows for different teachers with multiple roles within the school to understand their roles and responsibilities in the process of providing transition services. Participants said good plans start as early as possible. One teacher who had just transferred from the middle school to the high school, was surprised, awed, and proud of seeing IEPs created in 8th grade that were being followed with fidelity in high school. Program coherence provided the organizational process that allowed input from all stakeholders in the IEP process and created collaboration across schools.

### **Professional Community**

Professional community is defined as the effect of coordinated social resources of professional staff in a school that allows personnel to share goals for student outcomes, accept collective responsibility for meeting goals, and perform collaborative problem solving (Newman, King, and Youngs, 2001). Individual transition services start when a student reaches age 14, continue until 21 years of age, require substantial cooperation between all school personnel throughout a school district, and include community agencies and businesses. At the school level, general education teachers must be able to make connections between student individual goals and the content of their courses. School counselors assess student career ambitions and capabilities giving format and structure to the future goals of early adolescents. Special educators must assist in facilitating students' access to the appropriate in-school classes, vocational or tech-school career paths, and possibly arrange services from outside agencies that occur during the

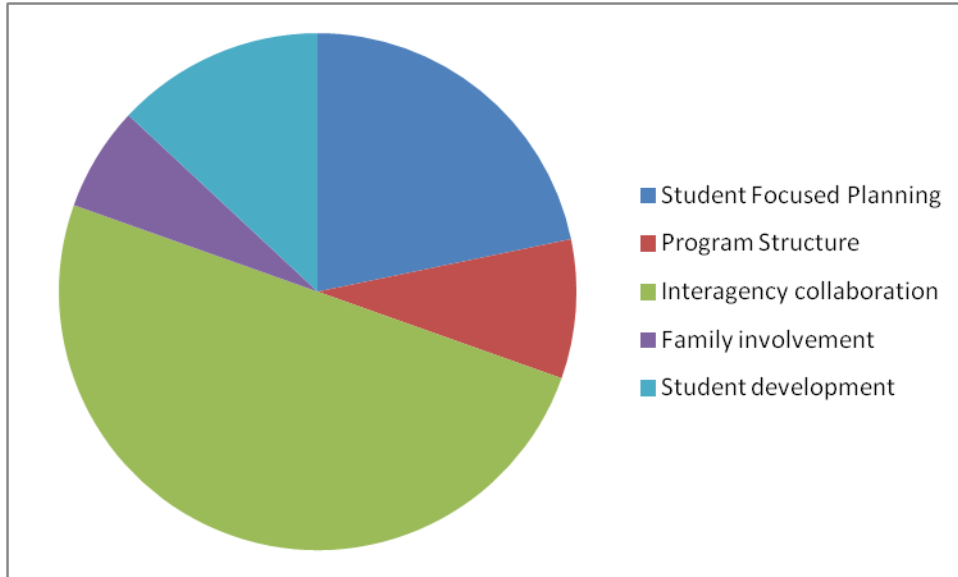


school day. The interaction of each school staff member is dependent on others, creating professional community to provide student transition services.

Program coherence is a prior condition because professional community cannot exist without the procedural guidelines, defining roles and responsibilities that set the foundation for day-to-day efforts to assist students. This logic of interaction that each component creates the environment for other elements to exist is portrayed in participant responses; collaboration was most often associated with professional community.

Student-focused planning was the second theme most often noted as being connected to professional community. This is a logical expectation as the IEP process of determining student goals, needs, and plans to attain post-secondary objectives requires the skills and assistance of professionals in other schools and outside agencies or businesses. Student development, the structured learning components of transition services that range between general education content area classrooms or off-campus work experience are related to professional community as coordination of services requires the cooperation of those personnel in matching curriculum and experiences to students' goals. Figure 11 represents the perceived importance of professional community on each transition component as a relative proportion of the number of remarks made within the interview data.

Figure 11. Professional community - participant associations by proportion of responses to each component of transition services.



**Professional community and collaboration.** A school counselor at A-ville sums up how other staff affects transition services at the school:

I think that with our IEP teachers. . . we have a great set of teachers that are very involved and are constantly reaching out and see what the student's next step is and how to go about that is. They are counselors in a way, helping the students move on. We have a really good group and I'm not just saying that, they really are very, very good. They really care about their student. . . . Our regular ed teachers across the board work well with our special ed. students. I think they are concerned about the students and we always have a regular ed teacher who will attend IEP meetings. If they are in the career and tech program those teachers always come to the meetings, all the time. I think everybody is pretty involved with the transition process for sure. (Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

The description of the involvement of both special education and general education teachers depicts depth and a willingness to work beyond their role that connotes the shared sense of responsibility and commitment.

Collaboration is between all stakeholders in the transition process. In this story of a student who is currently attending college, this school counselor at B-ville credits the parents and teachers for creating the plan and seeing it through, allowing the student to succeed in college.

She's dyslexic, she goes to xxxxx university, she might be a junior now, this student had severe dyslexia and you know what, I didn't realize it at the time why it took her forever to write everything out. I finally read her record. From day one, she was a worker, she might not of had the best SAT scores or anything like that, but we were able to get a recorder for the SATs so she wouldn't have to write everything down. The parents were very involved. The teachers were very involved. She applied to xxxx university and got in. She's doing extremely well because we knew she has the dyslexia. You think of it as writing but it is reading too and you mix the words around, books on tape, some computer programs to do it, that one worked out to the "T".

Researcher: Do you remember how early she started aiming at college?

It was always in her plan. I credit her parents for that.

Researcher: That leads to the next part of my questions what contributed to this outcome?

Her parents and all the support she received here. it isn't like you have a learning disability, and we're going to put you on the back burner. No it was, tell us what you want and we are going to try and get you to wherever you want to go and reach your goal and if it's books on tapes or computer programs we are doing to do that.(Interview, B-ville School Counselor)

As an example of professional community and collaboration, this story includes a problem that was solved, a solution that involved general education teachers as well as the special educators, and describes a multi-year plan leading to the student attaining her post-secondary goal of attending college.

Professional community and collaboration are evident when participants describe how transition services have improved over their tenure at the school. A science teacher at B-ville describes how she sees the changes at the school in the 20 years she has been working there.

We used to not worry about it 20 years ago when I started. We didn't use to worry about what they did after they got out of here. We didn't worry as much, they were just in a class by themselves and we didn't give them I wouldn't say the opportunity, but they were limited when they got out of school and now the possibilities are wide-open. we've come a long way in what we do and how we help kids get out and into college or secondary or on the job training so they can go into the job force right away and be successful. It was not existent.

Researcher: I know that the XXXX has had a program they are working on here for 3 years, has this really occurred in the last 3 years?

No, it has been gradual. We have worked the career project, it has been an evolving program and it keeps just getting better and better. We didn't always meet with kids and guidance counselors. I think we are doing the right thing. How long it's been, I mean 20 years ago we did some, but not like it is today. It was a separate class and those teachers actually helped those kids transition. Where now, it is a team and we are all working together and seeing what the kids want. What is their desire? What do they want to do? . . .and not discouraging them and saying, "you can't be a veterinarian, or a vet assistant." We have really opened up what they can do, it may take them longer, and they may need more assistance but, they can do it and they get there. (Interview, B-ville Science Teacher)

This explanation includes collaboration, efforts to assist students in reaching their post-secondary goals, and a program philosophy that emphasizes individual goals as the focus of transition services. The transition services program has altered the behavior of school personnel, many of whom are now helping students focus on post-secondary goals and interacting and collaborating within the school and in the community.

**Professional community and student-focused planning.** When asked about the number of students with IEPs in her class, this science teacher at B-ville tells of working with a special education co-teacher. This example of professional community provides evidence of the general education teacher's attitude and thinking about IEP meetings and her role in them.

Researcher: Approximately what percentage of students in your classes have IEPs?

I have a tremendous amount because I have a team-taught biology class so those kids and I have a team teacher with me Mr. xxxx. He's with me and we co-teach the class. We both teach the class together. I would say that I have more than most teachers; over 50%, so will have about 30 students with IEPs in all of my classes because I am the "team teacher" class.

Researcher: Of those all those students, approximately how many do you sit in on their IEP meetings?

Well, the IEP teachers will invite us especially, if the kids are having problems in our classes. I go to a lot of the team IEP meetings because I am the team teacher. Mr. xxxx won't go because he is already on the team. If it is for another teacher then he will go. I attend a lot, probably 3 a month. When you are talking about 30 kids over 9 months, I've been to a few. (Interview, B-ville Science Teacher)

In this next response, a special education teacher at B-ville who transferred from the middle school in the fall describes working with students on their transition goals while still at the middle school. When it affects student-focused planning, the professional community is a factor that extends beyond the grade-level to other schools where decisions and plans made in the middle school are respected and followed at the high school.

We listened to him. It's not something we'd make up. "you are going to do this" or "you are going to like this" or "we don't care and we'll put it down that you do". They have their input. They won't always tell you what they like or don't like. I think we put it down and then XXX looks at it and makes it work here at the high school. We didn't know at the middle school that they had these opportunities. I didn't know. (Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)

**Professional community and student development.** Student development includes the academic instruction, life skills assistance, and other interventions that aid the student to learn and advance through school. Here, a special education teacher in A-ville describes a successful student outcome and includes the collaborative nature of the activities that led to it.

A very active parent, it was my student with the traumatic brain injury, the parent was very much an advocate so that was probably a very big part of why that was so successful, she was open to any and all suggestions so if we said, "we'd like you to consider this." She'd say, "I might not agree, but I'll listen." Some of the services we recommended she took, others no, which was fine, and she also approached us.

Researcher: So, it was collaborative?

Yes, it was very collaborative, she'd say, "we've heard of this have you?" and if it was something that was not local, then chances are, I didn't. So, in between she and I, the transition coordinator, our director of special ed., and social worker, it was very collaborative and the counselor was involved too. It worked very, very well. In that situation, we had things lined up, office of vocational rehab was also involved, and so while the kid didn't get to college, which is what he wanted to do, the rest of us were a little more pragmatic about it, we were just hopeful about successful employment, full time employment. And we did manage to get that, that was our goal and that is where we did get him, eventually.

Researcher: Just to summarize all of that, so how would you describe what contributed to that outcome. Here are the variables. . .can you summate?

Biggest thing was collaboration, the open mindedness of all the people involved, the willingness to step outside of a comfort zone for me because, I don't deal with transition, or at that point in time, I hadn't dealt with transition. It was a

willingness of the parent to open up their case to outside people because sometimes that's an issue because sometimes we are talking about behavioral issues or emotional issues, that's a hard thing for a parent to do. So they were willing to step out a little bit and say "Okay, let me tell you about what life is like at home." It was just a merging of everything together that actually worked well for that particular student. (Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

This general education science teacher at A-ville describes how she works with the special education teacher to provide the extra support the students with IEPs in classes require. While the class is chemistry, the math skills involved require an intervention to help students complete the class successfully; a supportive professional community supports this type of interaction.

I know that my students are I think about 49% of my students have an IEP. This class that I teach is Applied Chemistry and it is designed to be a lower level science class. As for transition, I have a very open relationship with the learning support teachers. I know that many of my IEP students have math with them. That is the biggest issue they have in chem, is math. Some of it is skill, but most of it is attitude. Most of my students don't want to be here. For transition, they struggle a lot. The math teacher is really helpful. We have a great special ed staff here I think. I've gone to them when there are issues. "Hey, this is what I'm seeing.", "Can you give me suggestions on how to teach this?", things like that. I don't know if it falls under transitional services, but that's what I see. We have access to the kids' schedules, so I can see what math they are in. That's the biggest thing, chem. is all about math. Many of my students unfortunately are taking learning support math. They come to me and they can't do algebra at all. This is a huge, huge, challenge. So, when I do something like density, I don't ever have them solve for a variable, I give them three equations and they have to pick the equation. It's just that their math skills are very poor.(Interview, A-ville Science Teacher)

This general education science teacher in B-ville describes the variables in a successful student transition and brings up the topic of everyone working together to help the student succeed, including the willingness of the student to make the effort required.

Even though the student has graduated from high school, and is in college, the teacher still works with her, including proofing her papers.

Her work ethic and her willingness to be involved was really important, what other components added to this positive outcome? I think because her learning support teacher case manager was very good helping her fill out the college applications and her parents were very involved, the guidance counselor was involved in this process it really was this, "Hey get this person ready to go.", with everybody working on it.

I think the students that are going into the biology field and we help them get the needed skills. It was more of reading the notes skills so, what we did was have her take notes in class. I had my notes online and a lot of resources online which helped her in the biology class and eventually, what we did was narrowed what adaptation she had. So, when she got to college, she was really prepared for that she still has a learning disability in college in that she has to have people proof her papers, writing is difficult for her. So, we talked about the different ways you write a scientific paper and how do you get that to its polished form and that is still a struggle for her. So, she makes sure she either emails her mom or I and we help proof her paper in college.(Interview, B-ville Science Teacher)

**Professional community absence as a barrier.** Professional community does not always exist and it is apparent in this response from a special education teacher in B-ville. The participant was asked how other staff affects transition services at the school. This example points to the effect that the lack of professional community, in particular a school counselor's non-involvement with student-focused planning, can have on the IEP process

We don't do a very good job of communicating with our guidance counselors. Sometimes they come to the meetings, sometimes they don't. One of the biggest frustrations our department has with the guidance counselors is that they'll come to us with questions on the IEP but they were at the IEP meeting, they have a copy of the IEP, their office is closer to the cum files than ours, and look at them themselves but they don't. I understand that they have 300 students and we have only 30 on our caseload, they have a large caseload and sometimes it's as if they



rely on us to do what their job is for our caseload. They are very hands-off, but that's our impression but we are slowly working on that to. I think this is common due to the overlap. (Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)

This sentiment parallels what a counselor at the school said when asked about recommendations to improve transition services.

xxxxxx and I have talked about this before. A lot of times we meet with each of our kids every year for college and career counseling, scheduling, and things like that. Especially with the conferences that I have, I should be then type up my notes and I should be sending them to the case manager of that student so they know what we talked about career wise. But, I don't do that and it is my fault. I don't say anything until I get to the IEP meeting. And I think it would be helpful for the teacher if they had that *before* they got to the meeting. Then they'd know what we talked about and discussed. A lot of times they give the students their career interest inventory, have them research careers and I don't know anything about that either. So, I think we do work great together but we need to cross reference and share more information to help us with transition.

To summarize, professional community has an effect on several transition-related areas. Collaboration and professional community are related. Professional community gives the collaboration a procedural structure, assigning roles, and guiding the process of transition. Without a supportive professional community, it is unlikely that collaboration can exist. The participants frequently discussed working with others to solve problems and provide shared responsibilities. The use of the pronoun "we" was frequent and intentional. Student-focused planning was directly affected by professional community. IEP meetings cannot happen without the input from knowledgeable professionals. Student development, in particular the ability of general education teachers to accommodate students' transition goals within their course curriculum, is important, both

in IEP meetings and in the day-to-day activities of classes where these connections become evident to students.

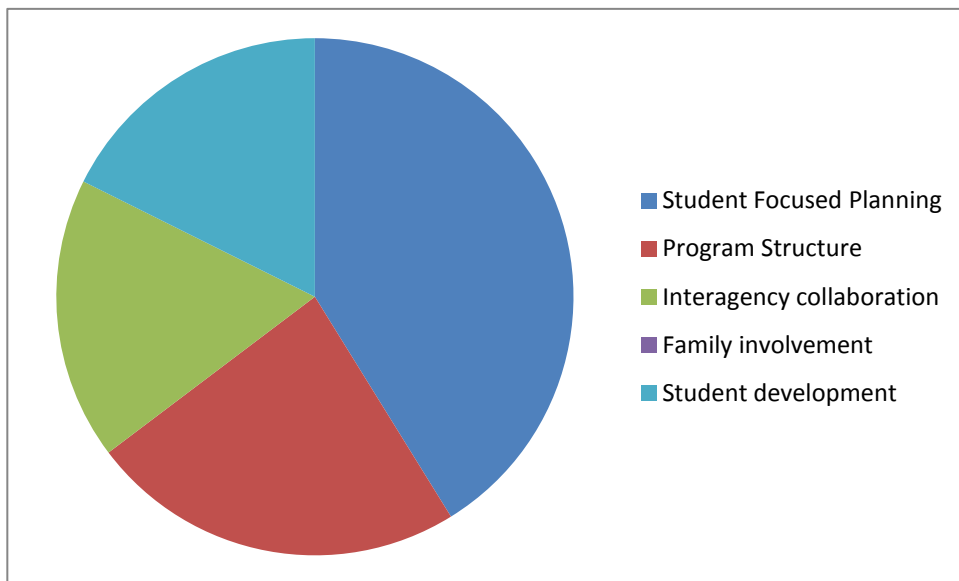
### **Teacher Knowledge**

Teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions describe the attributes required of individual school personnel to carry out the specific tasks of a program. School counselors must be competent, assessing student career goals and capabilities. Special educators must be able to facilitate the IEP process, support the integration of agencies from outside the school, assess and aid the appropriate academic instruction within the school, and ensure the involvement of student and family. General education teachers must be able to connect the curriculum content of their courses to students' individual goals and collaborate with others to introduce accommodations or specific interventions. While the process dictates the interdependent roles that each person plays in creating transition services, the knowledge and capabilities are different and separate.

Teacher knowledge as a variable important to transition services was revealed in two different ways in this research. References to teacher knowledge occurred spontaneously during responses to most questions. Participants revealed in their responses when "they did not know" and said so. Teacher lack of knowledge was often indicated when teachers described how other school personnel did not know or did not do what was expected or appropriate. Participants were asked directly to describe how their professional preparation affected how they provided transition services and what that preparation was.

Teacher knowledge was most often mentioned within the context of discussing student-focused planning. The ability to understand the process of creating an IEP and transition plan requires understanding of assessment, creating interventions that address identified student needs and, most conspicuously for transition services, creating a student identified goal and facilitating the activities necessary to attain that goal. The remaining transition components of student development, program structure, and collaboration each was near equally associated with teacher knowledge. Figure 12 shows the association of teacher knowledge on each component of transition services as a proportion.

Figure 12. Teacher Knowledge - participant associations by proportion of responses to each component of transition services.



**Teacher knowledge and student-focused planning.** Teacher knowledge is a key factor during the IEP process. Gathering information and understanding the results of assessments are skills that clarify the students' capabilities and helps them select attainable goals. A school counselor in B-ville describes how she used assessments to assist students and faculty in determining goals and coursework that fit the student.

Interest inventories are really big, "choose to work" is one. Because it not only looks at the student's interest, but also; what math background do you need for this, what reading background to you need for this and it is not different levels. Everything has to be a good fit. If you are on a fourth grade reading level it will be difficult to do some careers versus others. We also expose our students to voc-tech early on because maybe it is a career choice for them for transition, get them out into the work force by doing job shadows, interview skills, I just don't do this, other people along the way that do this too. (Interview, B-ville School Counselor)

**Teacher knowledge and program structure.** This response from a school counselor at A-ville demonstrates the team's knowledge of the process and components of transition services.

Researcher: What would you say contributed to that outcome that made it work?

Number one, the kid knowing from the get-go that he had a career goal and that we were able to foster that career goal in a real way. He wanted to do construction. He knew people that had done construction. So, we were able to give him resources through co-op and tech of learning carpentry and learning that skill set. So, we were able to bolster that feeling of being able to do that. Having great coordination here and there to be able to keep his grades at a stable point. He was able to get into the classes he needed here in terms of team taught and learning support coursework. To get through the requirements and then I think a lot also that contributed was working with his special ed. teacher on job skills, resume; all of those things, making sure with his special ed. teacher that all that was put together. When he was ready to apply, he had all the skills he needed and the professional look that he needed to.(Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

**Teacher knowledge, absence as a barrier.** The lack of teacher knowledge can affect how transition services are provided. A school counselor at A-ville discusses frustration with the process of identifying student career goals and special education teachers' unwillingness to broach the topic with students. The connection between student-focused planning, specifically the ability of a student to identify a career goal and a teacher's ability to assess student capability and schedule appropriate coursework is the topic in this response.

I think that special education teachers in general, people who are drawn to that as a field tend to be people who have big hearts and love children and want to make a difference in this world. Which is outstanding and as a consequence of that they do a lot of wonderful things with their students. But, speaking of realism to them is not necessarily something that comes naturally or easily to them. By the time a student gets to 11th grade, when I have a student who is at the lowest level math class, special ed. math class or pull out, and can't do fractions and can't tell you what the lowest common denominator is, and it is still in their IEP that their career goal is to be a veterinarian, that happens on 60% of my IEPs. It is very frustrating. I feel that there are people faculty members that are unwilling to confront the limitations or talk about alternate routes or ways to get to some similar places before it is very late in the process. That I think, is one of the biggest challenges to our transition services, that by the time I'm meeting a kid in 11th grade, I'm doing this or that and hearing from them, okay you want to be a doctor. Well, there a lot of things within the healthcare field. We can get you a job shadow in the hospital, we can look and see what's going on, but the likelihood, and I will never say that something is impossible, but there's not a prayer in heaven that you are ever going to take algebra 1 by the time your 21. The chances that you are going to be a physician, MD, are very, very, very low. So, let's look at other ways you can be part of this career field and help you transition. I don't find many people willing to have *that* conversation with a student. No one wants to be a dream crusher. It is de-motivating, but it's "you can do it", and I love that that measure is out there and "we believe in you", but it's overdone.

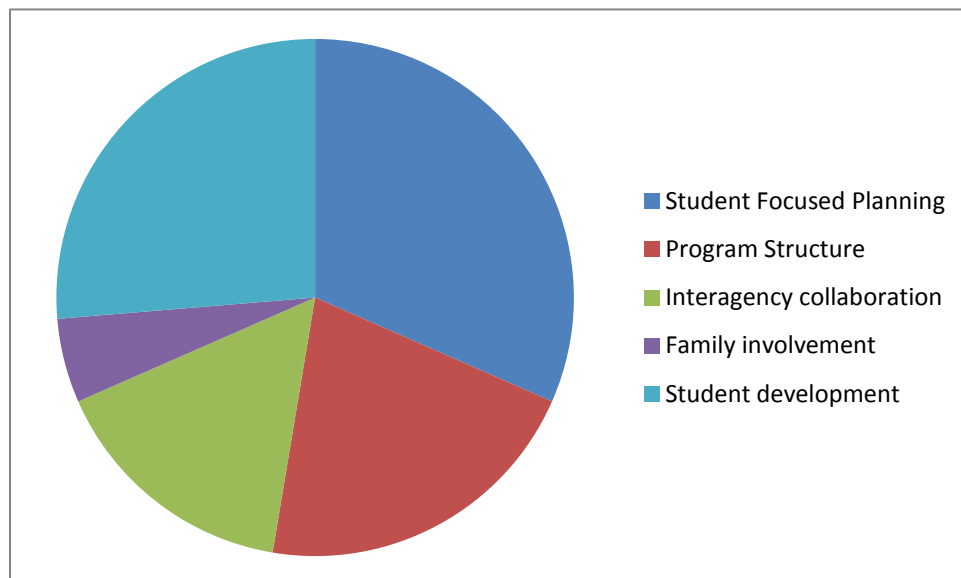
To summarize, participants perceived teacher knowledge in two ways: knowing the process and procedures of transition services, and having the skills and ability to

provide the services that are required. The first type of knowledge was related to program structure, essentially, what are we doing, and how does this work? The second area affected was student-focused planning. The process of assessing student goals and capabilities is challenging to school counselors and special education teachers. Without the information from assessments, which can only occur with the participation of the student, the transition plan is difficult to create and implement effectively.

### Technical Resources

Technical resources are the required facilities, tools, and supplies necessary to provide the services and activities related to an effective program. For the purpose of this research, technical resources include adequate personnel to provide services, and, the most basic resource, time.

Figure 13. Technical Resources - participant associations by proportion of responses to each component of transition services.



Participants discussed the tools required and they included software that allowed all stakeholders access to student assessments and reports of progress. Software would encourage communication, and, in combination with shared data, would discourage overlapping efforts and by so doing define roles and responsibilities.

Participants associated the effect of technical resources on student-focused planning, student development, and program structure in order of most to least affected. Student -focused planning was primary; staff responses most often focused on IEP creation, a task that includes assessment, gaining student participation, and collaboration. Time was related to student-focused planning as participants mentioned being able to meet with students as a challenge. Time was considered as a sub-factor of program structure; teacher scheduling and allotment of time for student-teacher conferences was controlled by the allowance for these activities by leadership and the overall structure of the school day. Student development was affected by logistical supports such as transportation to and from off-campus internships or co-op jobs, and fitting student career and technical skills education into the academic schedule of the school.

**Technical resources and student-focused planning.** Transition services require a complex array of supports. In each role represented in this research, the participants must interact with the students, family, and each other. The resources that each role requires can be extensive. This A-ville teacher focuses on school counselors and describes how resources are affecting transition services at the school.

What I can tell you is that I think what I know of transition service is mostly focused in the guidance office and they are really overburdened. I think with stuff they have to do. So, I don't think the resources are being funneled over there

particularly well. They're really antiquated in their use of technology, they just this year for the first year are doing the common app online. So, some of that I don't see that the district is putting a lot of resources into that at this point.  
(Interview, A-ville Teacher)

Personnel are a resource and are evidence for support of a program. A special education teacher at A-ville is explaining the value of the transition coordinator in the school while at the same time mentioning the challenge of finding appropriate assessments for students as part of IEP planning and goal setting.

Well, if you consider a person a resource, we have our transition coordinator who serves as a liaison with the intermediate unit and ourselves. She often provides us with updates on the state level and how that is going to impact us, she is very involved in our training to create transitional IEPs. We've done some of our own research online trying to get some surveys that we like, some vocational aptitude type of tools that we liked, so we've done that on an individual basis we've gotten a compilation together of surveys and things that we might be able to use so our transition person helped us with that. We have different transition assessments, formal and informal, life skills, taking care of grades. We've assembled some things but, right now, we are in that new phase of this is transitional and looking to where we can go with it. (Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

**Technical resources and student development.** This school counselor at A-ville identifies outside agencies as a resource to the transition services for students. Citing a broad range of assistance that includes mental health, drug abuse, and office of vocational rehabilitation (OVR) these outside agencies are part of the process for students and are included in helping them prepare for their post-secondary goals.

We do use a lot of outside agencies, rest care, a student's assistance team for student who are struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues. They will come in, assess the student, and make a recommendation on that assessment. Some of the drug and alcohol agencies will come in and work with our student one-on-one here at the high school. We used to have XXXX, where students can



get their GED preparation and take the GED. So, there are resources that we have used including OVR. I know that with OVR, the special ed teachers will contact them to work with the students as they are ready to transition. The OVR person will attend IEP meeting and tell them what that will look like. Our community agencies are all very, very good. Those are a few instances of who we work with consistently I think. (Interview, A-ville School Counselor)

This science teacher at B-ville refers to access to the community for a student internship or job experience as a transition resource. This connection to important student development opportunities off-campus is nurtured to sustain access to them.

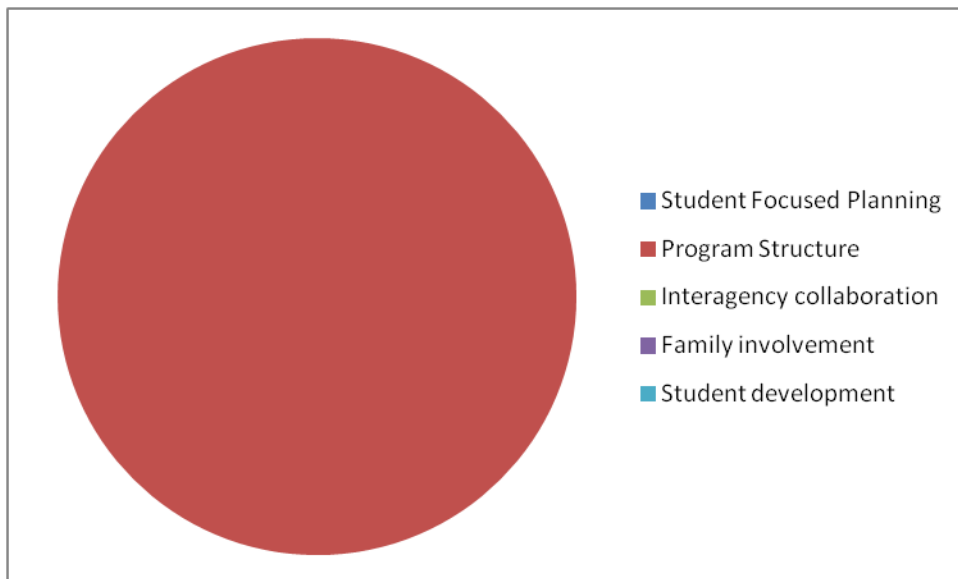
Well, if you are just like me, we find the resources that we need. You reach out to the community, you reach out to community member, you say, I have this student, can they job shadow you. I've had students come to me and say you talked in class when I had biology. I know your sister is a lab tech, can I observe her? I want to be a lab technician, that kind of stuff. I think the pathways are the right way to go and once a kid's in a pathway then, I will get a medical student or a student in the medical field in the community and xxxx does a great job as our career placement person. I haven't mentioned her but she is a great resource as well for all students not just the learning support students. We have a lot of kids in internships right now, some of her kids are going out and they want to be farmers and she hooks them up with farmers and they get time off from school to go work with them. (Interview, B-ville Teacher)

Participants view resources as any person, device, or accessible educational experience that exists beyond the school. Being able to send students for mental health services is a resource. Getting transportation to bring a student to a job in the next town over is a resource. Software that will allow all school personnel to digitize student records and assessments is a resource. Finally, yet importantly, having enough personnel overall to provide quality services is a resource. These resources could be applied to communicate, collaborate, and expand the range of out- of -school experiences for students.

## **Principal Leadership**

Leadership is required for the implementation of any school program. The principal is the legally responsible authority within a school and as such, provides or supports the other elements of school capacity and the individual transition components. In this study, participants did not discuss leadership at length. When asked specifically how leadership affected transition in their school, participants mentioned all the levels of personnel above them from department chair to the superintendent. It was clear leadership mattered; all participants sought direction and support from leadership. In both research sites, principals and assistant principals served as the Local Educational Agency (LEA) representative on student IEP teams. It was reported that their participation was consistent and valuable in the meetings. Leadership was seen also as a provider of resources; participants at both sites reported that they receive what they ask for in support of transition services. When asked if leadership provided guidance overall for the program, there was a greater variety of responses. There were infrequent references to leadership throughout the discussion. As shown in Figure 14, when leadership was mentioned, it was in reference to program structure and collaboration.

Figure 14. Principal Leadership-participant associations by proportion of responses to each component of transition services.



**Leadership at B-ville.** There were differences in perspectives of leadership, depending on the site. B-ville participants saw their leadership, which included the teacher who headed the transition services in the school, the assistant principals, principal, and superintendent, as leadership that supported transition activities with a goal of meeting student needs.

This special educator describes how leadership at B-ville affects transition by having a positive view, supportive, yet not always in the forefront.

I don't know. I haven't really dealt with it. I fell like our special ed director, it's a big push. But I don't know , I mean I know he does a lot of stuff in the background that we don't see so I don't know what he's doing. Administration here, I can't answer that one. I can only go from our immediate supervisor; she's a teacher, from her perspective. Higher up she reports to the bigger ones.

Researcher: I guess what I'm looking for is: Do you feel a push forward, or a push back?

I'm not seeing that it is back, they want you to go forward. They're encouraging you to get them up to par, look good, are right, what the kid needs. So, in that perspective, there is definitely a push forward. They never want you to go backwards. (Interview, B-ville Special Education Teacher)

This description of leadership by a B-ville general education teacher is also positive. The feeling it gives is one of satisfaction and support from all of the layers of leadership at the school.

I think our leadership and administration are really committed, our superintendent keeps saying we want to make sure kids are career and college ready. Are they ready for that next step? We've heard that over the last several years and I think they are very supportive. If we have ideas, they will help us follow through.

Researcher: Do you end up relying on one principal or assistant principal is it pretty well balanced?

Yes, I think it's well balanced you could go to any one of them and say, "hey here's my idea.", and here at xxxx, they are really open to any ideas if they will help the kids. xxxxx has made a lot of changes since she has been the head of the transition program. We have students with Asperger's and now we have a staff member to work with them.(Interview, B-ville Science Teacher)

A school counselor offers another positive view of how leadership at B-ville affected transition services. This description of how the director of special education promoted a plan to allow a student who could have graduated to remain at the school.

It affects it greatly, and we are a bunch of peons. It needs to come from the top down. Our director of special ed is fabulous. He knows so much and he tries to do so much, everything for the student. We had, two years ago; we had a student who transferred to us, another that was on the spectrum. Pretty much autistic, they came to us from a full cyber school program for years and years. The worst thing you could do with a student with autism is keep them in a cyber program. The

student, intelligent, but backwards beyond belief, was going to graduate with the credits but wasn't going to graduate with any life skills or a driver's license or graduate knowing how to fill out a job application and things like that. So, the director of special ed.'s recommendation was to stay another year, maybe take some classes that maybe they didn't get that they wanted and maybe get some of these applicable job skills.(Interview, B-ville School Counselor)

**Leadership at A-ville.** A-ville participants did not share the same perspective of leadership. This is the response from a special education teacher at A-ville.

It is always the filter down effect isn't it? We don't always have a clear and concise understanding of what our roles are by the time it filters down to us. and that comes from the state, through administration, perhaps from the intermediate unit, perhaps from the transition coordinator, so sometime by the time it gets to us we are not always exactly clear what our roles are and it gets lost in translation from one level to the other. We have a lot of emails flying around, like last year, "Is this what your really mean to say here?" and "Is this what you want us to do" or "Why are you asking us to do this?" Sometimes you know, some of our directions contradict themselves or they just seem to be nonsensical or its repetitious and it doesn't need to be, it's frustrating but it's the way it is at every school and every topic.(Interview, A-ville Special Education Teacher)

A general education teacher at A-ville had this response when asked about leadership's affect on transition.

Well, I think I can be cynical all I want, I don't attribute any bad intent to anyone in leadership here. My main beef with leadership in this district is that they don't have any vision. Any big picture vision. If you remember the movie *Blazing Saddles* and the line of Mongo's, "Mongo only pawn... in game of life", that's how I feel. Nobody tells me what the goal is, the big picture other than the very concrete, what we need to get out of school improvement. We need to have x percent of our kids better and next year have to be X plus five percent of our kids improved. I think we're real ripe for somebody to come in and say, let's look big picture and really change the nature of our school so that kids were better prepared for life outside of here. I don't see that happening.

You know, the wheels move, and I think we make progress, and I think everyone who is trying to make the wheels move have the best intentions, but they don't see

beyond what has to be done tomorrow. Nobody is asking them to see what has to be done tomorrow. I don't know if the taxpayers want us to do that either.  
(Interview, A-ville General education Teacher)

The participants' responses from each location suggest that the program implementation of transition services that focus on the Indicator 13 transition program criteria for IEP creation are having a positive effect. Leadership is not involved in day-to-day transition service activity but once the program is implemented the tacit approval to perform duties that support students reaching their goals are important.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perspectives on providing transition services to high school students with special needs and to understand the variables that act as facilitators or barriers to providing those services. This study has attempted to provide clarity to this problem through interviews of school personnel at two different schools. Participants included high school special education teachers, general education teachers, and school counselors. Using an interview protocol with a combination of grand tour questions and questions targeted on discovering participants' understanding of specific school capacity components and transition activities, data were collected and analyzed. It is apparent from the shared experiences of these school professionals that a strong relationship between the two frameworks of school capacity and transition. Chapter V will tie the results from this study to existing research in transition services and school capacity with the purpose of increasing the understanding of the interaction of these frameworks and shed light upon potential future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The relationship between school capacity components and transition activities at the school level is somewhat paradoxical. While the relationship is obviously a complex one, the responses of participants showed that the relationship of acting as facilitator (helping) or barrier (not-helping), is often as simple as school capacity components existing or not existing. When school capacity components are evident, transition services are provided, albeit with a sophisticated array of procedures and collaborative relationships. When school capacity components do not exist in strong amounts, transition services are challenging to school personnel to provide.

It is also important to note that this study was not meant to evaluate the transition services of the schools involved. That said, the differences in the responses between B-ville and A-ville and the knowledge they were at different stages of program implementation did help clarify the relationship between school capacity and the effective delivery of transition services. It should be said though that the answers to questions by members of both schools were directly related to the topic of the questions. Overall, staff from both schools were well-versed in the purpose of IEPs and their planning, the potential to improve outcomes for all students by providing transition services, the types and levels of service delivery, and the focus upon individual student's

needs. In the end, the interviews in this study did shed light on the relationship between the various elements of school capacity as articulated by Newman, King, and Youngs, (2001) and transition programming (Kohler, 1996).

### **Key Themes**

This study of school personnel perceptions of transition services has revealed five key themes: (a) program coherence is central; (b) professional community is a result of program coherence; (c) program coherence and professional community beget collaboration and student-focused planning; (d) program coherence and professional community beget collaboration and student-focused planning; (e) collaboration is a systemic expectation. (f) expression of knowledge is procedural not transition specific.

### **Program Coherence is Central**

The controlling contextual element of transition services is the school capacity component program coherence. Program coherence is the result of an institutional effort to create a specific program that positively affects student outcomes (Newman, King, and Youngs, 2001). In this research study, the implemented program at the school-level reflected an effort by the state department of education to establish and refine a structure of school-based transition services. Without this effort to create a systemic institutional program with procedures that ascribe process, responsibilities, commitment of resources, and dedication to improve student outcomes, it is unlikely that other components of school capacity can exist or transition activities can occur. Because of the nature of transition services, a complex longitudinal process that transcends school and interagency boundaries, efforts by a single teacher acting alone to provide services that are not part of



a larger institutional program effort will be unsuccessful. Fullan (2001) notes individuals cannot create institutional reform because *they* are trained to perform a role within a program that does not exist.

In their study of transition barriers, practices, and improvements, Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) found that systems and policy was the top priority for improving transition services. This research shares that conclusion. Program coherence and professional community are the two school capacity elements that appear to be at the core of school-level transition services. Essentially, first there must be a program.

### **Professional Community is a Result of Program Coherence**

Professional Community is the second most important school capacity component affecting transition services. Professional community is the result of program coherence that is "taking effect;" i.e. processes are created and followed, responsibilities are assigned, personnel are learning the activities important to the role they play within the program, and students are entering and exiting the program. Professional community is evident when school personnel understand they play a single role in a multi-level process that begins with student and families, but includes general education teachers, counselors, special education teachers, school leadership, external agencies and businesses. In short, everyone must understand they are in this together. Participants in this study expressed their expectation of counselors to provide career assessments, general education teachers to connect student goals to class curriculum, and school leadership to provide overall support for transition activities.

These findings related to professional community address a concern cited in Wandry et al., (2008), who, in their discussion of the barriers to providing transition services by teacher candidates, discuss the factor of *systemic helplessness*. Open-ended comments by their respondents strongly suggested that systemic barriers to support felt insurmountable and led to feelings of pessimism. Conversely, Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray, (2008) reported high school special educators ranked *systems and policy* as the second highest effective practice of transition. The findings in this current research at both sites suggest the presence of a structured program and personnel's awareness of it, regardless of its level of integration, can create feelings of pride and empowerment in school personnel.

### **Program Coherence and Professional Community Beget Collaboration and Student-Focused Planning**

Program coherence and its subsidiary professional community are most evident in the transition taxonomy elements of interagency collaboration and student-focused planning. These two transition elements are dependent on the establishment of institutional procedure, role responsibilities, and institutional commitment to the program. Student-focused planning includes the development and implementation of a student's IEP and transition plan. For example, in this study a special education teacher described being part of an IEP team at the middle school for a 14-year-old eighth grader whose transition goal was "he wants to do something with sports." Currently, the student is a first semester freshman and the high school, understanding its role as facilitator, collaborated with a local public university to form an internship where the student is

working in the athletics department doing maintenance work at the football stadium during part of the school day. This is an excellent example of institutional level support of transition services, starting with student-focused planning that led to the creation of a transition plan. Collaboration at the institutional level is demonstrated by the high school honoring the student goal and IEP by fitting work experience into the student's schedule and providing transportation 16 miles to and from the internship site. Further collaboration with a post-secondary institution completes this compendium of procedure, collaboration, and commitment.

### **Collaboration is a Systemic Expectation**

When professional community exists, collaboration is an integral procedure, not the sole responsibility of a special educator to instigate or facilitate. Professional community is the school capacity element that sets the procedure and responsibilities that form the collaborative action between individuals, institutions, and agencies. Participants in this study were not concerned with the basic act of collaborating with other stakeholders in the process of providing transition services. In B-ville, they had an expectation, based on established procedures, that interaction would occur and it would assist and support the students. Participants in A-ville did not share the same high level of expectation but nonetheless understood that the process of providing transition services could include outside agencies and other school professionals fulfilling different roles and responsibilities. Participants' frustration with collaboration meant that other stakeholders did not understand their roles within the procedure or that there was a mutual conflict of responsibility. Most often mentioned by both counselors and special

education teachers was the responsibility of assessing student career interests and capabilities. Both B-ville and A-ville participants in both roles discussed this as an issue affecting their ability to provide transition services and suggested working together to improve the problem. Milsom and Hartley (2005) suggested that high school counselors would benefit from professional development related to IDEA and transition services. They felt increased knowledge would in turn lead to improved collaborative relationships with special education teachers and, foremost, would be of great benefit to students.

### **Expression of Knowledge is Procedural Not Transition Specific**

Teacher knowledge, a school capacity component, appears to be associated with the understanding of procedures, roles and responsibilities more than specific transition interventions. Participants did not discuss specific transition interventions; they talked about multi-step transition plans and the components that comprised the plans. When in need of assistance, special educators went to the transition coordinator at their school or the director of special education for the district. General education teachers and school counselors asked special educators for assistance. When asked about their professional preparation for providing transition services none of the participants had a specific transition services course while in college or graduate school; most cited the professional development that was part of the current program implementation. Frequently, they included on-the-job training and personal experience as very helpful in guiding students.

In the study conducted by Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) teachers rated their overall level of preparation as being from *somewhat unprepared* to *somewhat*

*prepared*; level of satisfaction with their transition training was rated as *somewhat unsatisfied*. The participants of the current study did not share the same perceptions regarding their level of preparation and training. There was no specific mention by any participants that they wanted more professional development on transition services per se. Rather than a lack of satisfaction with their personal professional preparation for providing transition services, the attitude presented by participants in the current research reflected a sense of pride in their professional capabilities. When dissatisfaction was expressed, it was directed at a lack of program structure or direction from school leadership, an institutional issue rather than a professional preparedness problem. This finding is consistent with other previous research. Lubbers, et al. (2008) reported 35% of their participants chose systems and policy as the top area for improvement of transition services. Li, Basset, and Hutchinson (2009) found secondary teachers were minimally involved in transition services and those teachers reported limited attention being paid to legislated transition services for students with special needs. In their research into teachers' perceptions of competency to provide transition services, Benitez, et al. (2008) surmised that teachers' feelings of being unprepared might explain the low level of reported transition service implementation. Their assumption was that teachers might be avoiding having to offer transition services because they felt professionally unprepared to provide them. The feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction with knowledge is mutual, although both are targeting different aspects of transition services. An area of future research would be to revisit the participants at the current research sites and invite them

to respond to the same transition competency instrument used in the work of Benitez et al. (2008).

### **Implications for Future Research**

The goal of this study was to further exploration of contextual factors that affect transition services. Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray's (2008) study of transition barriers, practices, and potential solutions offered an initial format for understanding contextual influences to providing transition services. These researchers identified the top three barriers as resources, stakeholder involvement, and systems and policies. Rather than assume there is an unknown structure of barriers affecting transition activities in schools, the use of prior theoretical frameworks of school organization such as those used in this study would provide useful information for researchers and consumers of research alike. For example, the themes discovered by Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray appear to be equivalent to the school capacity components from this research. School capacity, it's components and definitions is well suited to understanding school contextual factors and should be adapted as the model to understand program implementation on the institutional level.

If school capacity is used to standardize the discussion of factors that affect transition services, the following step would be to establish a method of assessing the quality or quantity of each school capacity component. The school personnel who participated in this research discussed transition almost exclusively as an integrated procedure that involved stakeholders from middle schools to local businesses and community service providers to regional universities. Providing transition services in the

minds of the special educators was a gathering of assessment and student information to coordinate services to reach student goals. It is the opinion of this researcher that the study of school-level transition practices and services include an assessment of the elements of school capacity and their effect on teacher and student outcomes. The inclusion of this information in a consistent manner would enhance the value of future transition research.

A final implication for future research would be the investigation of parent satisfaction and student outcome data in relation to the assessed level of school capacity components. What is the relationship between individual school capacity components and these *consumer* stakeholder perceptions of transition services?

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study have implications for school-level teacher professional development and pre-service education. As noted in Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson's (2010) conceptualization of special education teacher quality and preparedness, the nature of how services are delivered has been altered over time by research and policy. Today, special education teachers at the secondary level do not work exclusively as solo practitioners directly with students. Collaboration is essential for special educators to be a facilitator with outside agencies, consultant to general educators, and provider of services to students. Brownell et al. (2010) use RTI as the example of the new school landscape for special education. Certainly, there are parallels between RTI and transition services as both are institutionalized programs which rely on established systemic process and procedures prior to special educators, with general

educators and school counselors implementing effective practices and improving student achievement and outcomes. Special education and general education, teachers, and school counselors cannot be expected to implement effective practices without prior institutionalization that includes integrated professional development for *all* school personnel in procedure *and* practices. Furthermore, pre-service education of special and general education should include instruction in curriculum and instructional programming that broadens their knowledge beyond the classroom focus of pacing guides, unit plans, and lesson plans, thusly giving educators a global perspective of their role. If implementation of a program requires systemic change, it makes sense that school professionals are well versed in the global dynamics of such change integrated with their knowledge of their personal professional role.

### **Limitations**

There were three potential limitations to this study: potential researcher bias, use of a restricted sample, and participant reactivity/ sensitivity to maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. All of these factors could limit the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Researcher bias is a potential issue as this researcher has struggled with the task of providing transition services in a public school as a special education teacher. Two steps were taken to restrict the effect of researcher bias. First, this study relied on two well-defined conceptual frameworks: school capacity and the transition taxonomy. All coding was performed searching for responses which fit within those frameworks.



Second, coding was reviewed and validated by two doctoral-level special educators with experience in transition services.

Sampling was a limitation due to a small sample size and the fact that none of the administrators participated at all. The sample size for each professional role participating in relation to the total number of people in that role at their school was also small; B-ville had two of four school counselors participate, two of 11 special education teachers, and two of approximately 100 general education teachers. A-ville had two of five school counselors, two of 12 special education teachers, and two of 119 general education teachers participate. The General education teachers and school counselors were selected using the sampling technique called snowballing (Goodman, 1961; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Snowball sampling is a method where the researcher exploits the established relationship with a participant and asks if there are others they know who might participate. A potential drawback of this method is that it can result in participants who are like-minded or who may who may have colluded in part or whole in fabricating their responses. For example, teachers in this study might have been telling the researcher what they felt the person who nominated them wanted to hear. Such a dynamic may have been responsible, for example, for the positive findings related to B-ville's implementation of transition services. However, this bias appears unlikely since participant responses were consistent within each site without regard to the recommending participant.

Non-response by school leadership was an unexpected issue. Several attempts were made via different methods to invite and encourage assistant principals and

principals to participate. The purpose for the participation of leadership was to gain their perspective in hopes of more clearly understanding their role as a key element of school capacity and to triangulate and validate the data collected from other participants. When it became clear members of school leadership would not participate, school counselors were invited and responded quickly. School counselors are valuable as participants as they work directly with students on post-secondary career assessment and planning. It was assumed, and since validated, their input would be valuable as a key professional responsibility of that role is the post-secondary goals of every student in the school disabled and non-disabled alike on their client roster.

Two areas that were not included in this research that could add valuable information to our understanding of school capacity and transition services would be student outcome and parent satisfaction data. While this study explored the perspectives of school personnel, it would appear from those perspectives that their program implementation was effective, especially for B-ville. In truth, we know nothing of the outcome their efforts produced. Key outcome data would help strengthen the findings by connecting strong institutional structure and commitment to student outcomes. That was why Will (1984), included program evaluation in the original model of transition services. Research that can properly explain the role that school capacity plays in terms of student outcomes is the next step that leads to that vision.

### **Conclusion**

Life is difficult (Peck, 1978), especially for a 14 year old with a disability starting high school. Into a young person's life steps a special education teacher to serve as a

guide to the next stage beyond high school. Transition goals for such a student would nominally entail four years of oversight and facilitation. For some students, transition services continue until the age of 21 years. It would make sense that one person, without the support of other professionals within his or her school or without procedural structures or technical resources would fail miserably trying to create and provide transition services alone. It is apparent from conversations with the counselors and teachers in this study that transition can be an institutional system of service delivery that can meet the transition needs of these students.

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## APPENDIX A

### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
participant	Facilitator Barrier Neutral	School Capacity component						Transition taxonomy				
		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		



## APPENDIX A

### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 3: Tell me about a time when a student's transition plan was not effective/What contributed to that outcome?												
SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
participant	Facilitator Barrier Neutral	School Capacity component						Transition taxonomy				
		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

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### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
participant	Facilitator Barrier Neutral	School Capacity component						Transition taxonomy				
		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

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### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
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		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

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### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
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		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

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### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
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		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

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### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
participant	Facilitator Barrier Neutral	School Capacity component						Transition taxonomy				
		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

## APPENDIX A

### DATA ANALYSIS MATRICES BY SCHOOL

SCHOOL ANALYSIS Question 2: Tell me about a time when a student transition plan was effective/what were the factors that contributed to that outcome?												
participant	Facilitator Barrier Neutral	School Capacity component						Transition taxonomy				
		Principal Leadership	Program Coherence	Professional community	Teacher knowledge, skills, Disposition	Technical Resources	Other	Student focused planning	Student Development	Family involvement	Program Structure	Interagency Collaboration
B-VILLE SPED1	F					X			X			
	F		X							X		
B-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X						X	
	B		X		X			X				
B-VILLE SPED3	F			X					X			X
	B						X	X				
B-VILLE SPED4	F		X					X				
	F		X	X					X		X	X
	F		X					X				
	F		X	X		X		X	X			X
B-VILLE TEACH1	F		X	X				X	X			X
	F				X	X			X			
	F			X					X			X
	F		X							X		
	F			X				X	X			
B-VILLE TEACH2	F			X								X
	F		X	X								X
B-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F			X						X		
	F				X			X	X			
B-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F		X	X		X		X				X
	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE SPED1	F		X	X	X					X		X
A-VILLE SPED2	B		X		X			X				X
A-VILLE TEACH1	B		X	X	X						X	
A-VILLE TEACH2	F			X	X			X				
A-VILLE COUNSELOR1	F		X		X	X		X			X	
A-VILLE COUNSELOR2	F			X	X	X		X	X	X		

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSITION STUDY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about transition services at your school?
2. Tell me about a time when a student's transition plan was effective.
  - i. What contributed to that outcome?
3. Tell me about a time when a student's transition plan was not effective.
  - i. What contributed to that outcome?
4. Describe how your professional preparation affects how you provide transition services.
5. Describe how other faculty and staff at your school affect transition services.
6. Describe how resources at your school affect transition services.
7. Describe how transition services have been provided to students over the time you have been at this school.
8. Describe how leadership at your school affects transition services
9. What are your recommendations to improve transition services at your school?